

OCTOBER 2013

MAGAZINE OF THE MARINES

Leatherneck

www.mca-marines.org/leatherneck

Bitter Beirut

A Lesson Learned
30 Years Ago

Urgent Fury, 1983:
Global Communism
Stopped Cold
By U.S. Marines

A Warhorse
Named "Reckless"
Goes Bronze

A Publication of the
Marine Corps Association
& Foundation





CWO-4 RANDY GADDO, USMC (RET)

Leathernecks in the 1st Bn, 8th Marines color guard practice prior to the 2012 Beirut Remembrance at the Beirut Memorial, Jacksonville, N.C. In the foreground is the Lebanese flag.

Remembering Their Heritage

The “Beirut Battalion”: 1st Battalion, Eighth Marine Regiment

By CWO-4 Randy Gaddo, USMC (Ret)

On 23 Oct. 1983, an Iranian terrorist suicide bomber, working through the Islamic extremist group Hezbollah, drove a truck filled with explosives into a four-story barracks building in Beirut, Lebanon, and pushed the detonation button. The ensuing explosion killed 220 Marines, 18 sailors and three soldiers, most of them either in or attached to 1st Battalion, 8th Marines (1/8). That battalion is now known as the “Beirut Battalion,” a moniker which battalion Marines adopted in the 20th century and have carried into the new millennium’s global war on terrorism as they continue to fight a sinister enemy.

Many of the Marines now serving in the “Beirut Battalion” weren’t even born when 1/8 earned that title in war-torn Lebanon; yet, the lessons learned from that day 30 years ago in many ways influence how Marines train and operate today.

Present-day 1/8 Marines returned from counterinsurgency operations in North Helmand province, Afghanistan, in August 2012.

“At 1/8’s patrol bases and FOBs [forward operating bases] up along the Helmand River Valley, as I walked through every one of our checkpoints, what would rush through my mind was the entrance to the Beirut building,” said 1/8’s former commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Kevin C. Trimble,

during a *Leatherneck* interview. He assumed command of the battalion in June 2011 and departed in June 2013 for the U.S. Air Force’s Air War College. “I’d think about what angle a vehicle would need to have a negative impact on our position.”

In Beirut, 1983, a terrorist truck bomb filled with gas-enhanced military-grade explosives crashed through the entrance of a four-story building housing about 400 U.S. servicemen, mostly Marines, most of them sleeping. The ensuing detonation was deemed the largest non-nuclear explosion the FBI ever had investigated. The death toll it wrought led to the highest single-day Marine casualty rate since Iwo Jima. Hundreds were injured.

The French headquarters was hit simultaneously that morning by an identical truck bomb, killing 58 French troops and with dozens more wounded.

The attacks resulted in exactly what the Iranian-backed terrorists wanted.

The devastating blow ended a two-year multinational “peacekeeping” effort in Beirut; within months all forces from the United States, France, Italy and Britain pulled out of Beirut.

The attack later was proven to be deliberately planned by extreme Islamic forces to test Western public and political resolve to stay the course in the Middle East in the face of high casualties. The West failed the test.

“Osama bin Laden drew inspiration from Hezbollah’s dual suicide attacks,” wrote retired Marine Colonel Timothy J. Geraghty, in his 2009 book, “Peacekeepers at War: Beirut 1983—The Marine Commander Tells His Story.” Geraghty was the commanding officer of the U.S. troops ashore at the time of the bombing.

“Al Qaeda’s first simultaneous suicide attacks on two U.S. embassies in eastern Africa on August 7, 1998, were directly modeled on Hezbollah’s 1983 attacks,” Geraghty wrote in the book’s preface, citing examples of other similar attacks in the book.

A question burns in the hearts and minds of people who know details of the 1983 bombing: If America and her allies had stood their ground in Beirut after the bombing, could the carnage on American soil on 11 Sept. 2001 have been avoided?

“Somehow, we had lost our sense of justice by refusing to retaliate against Islamic extremists who committed acts of war and murdered U.S. citizens,” wrote Geraghty. “It is no mystery that America’s reluctance emboldened them to bring their bloodshed to the American shores.”

People since have postulated that had the United States and allies stayed the course in 1983, perhaps the terrorist attacks of 11 Sept. 2001 would not have occurred and perhaps the 12-year global war on terrorism would not require that Western forces deploy to Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. It has been shown that the same terrorist groups—and in some cases the same terrorists—were involved in both.

Even though 1/8’s mission in Afghanistan was vastly different from the mission in Beirut 30 years ago, the foe they engaged is essentially the same: shadowy Islamic extremists whose lineage undoubtedly could be traced back to Beirut.

“We call it something different today, but it was called ‘peacekeeping’ then, and how we do things today is because of what those guys went through back then,” asserted Sergeant Major Steve Rice, who

If America and her allies had stood their ground in Beirut after the bombing, could the carnage on American soil on 11 Sept. 2001 have been avoided?



SGT RANDY GADDO

Marines with BLT 1/8 wait their turn to help as fellow servicemen move massive debris after the October 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut.

served a tour as the battalion’s sergeant major until transferring recently to a new duty station.

Indeed, the term applied to the mission—peacekeeping—that led up to the 1983 Beirut bombing was as shadowy as the forces that perpetrated the bombing. Marching orders from the National Command Authority to commanders in the field were as clear as mud; it was to be a “presence” mission.

“The mission from the start was opaque, nebulous,” asserted Geraghty, who was commanding officer of the 24th Marine Amphibious Unit during the time of the bombing. The ground combat element of

the 24th MAU at that time was Battalion Landing Team 1/8.

“It [the mission] was intentionally written that way, in generic terms,” he said. “It was a complex mission, and the presence concept was relatively untested. It required a special kind of discipline on the part of the troops exercising it.” He believes that is why Marines were sent in.

“But when you look at this sort of mission in terms of what we all learn as Marines, it flies in the face of all our doctrine. The decision to send us in was made with good intentions, but it was made from the heart rather than from the facts,” he concluded.

A special commission was appointed by the Secretary of Defense in November 1983 to conduct an independent inquiry into the 23 Oct. terrorist bombing. Named the Long Commission after its chairman, retired Admiral Robert L. J. Long, the commission of five senior military officers and one civilian official concluded that the mission statement and concept of operations were passed down the National Command Authority chain of command with little amplification.

As a result, the commission concluded, “Perceptual differences as to the precise meaning and importance of the ‘presence’ role of the USMNF [United States Multinational Force] existed throughout the chain of command. Similarly, the exact responsibilities of the USMNF commander regarding the security of Beirut International Airport were not clearly delineated in his mission tasking.”

The inquiry also established that the MAU commanders on the ground in Beirut interpreted their “presence” mission to require the USMNF to be visible, but not to appear to be threatening to the populace.

“This concern was a factor in most decisions made by the MAU commanders in the employment and disposition of their forces,” the report concluded. “The MAU commander regularly assessed the effect of contemplated security actions on the ‘presence’ mission.”



SSGT RANDY GADDO

Then-Vice President George H. W. Bush, center, tours the perimeter of the bombed barracks with the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen P.X. Kelley, left, and the commander of the 24th MAU, Col Timothy J. Geraghty, on 25 Oct. 1983.

LtCol Trimble was aware of the lessons to be learned from the Beirut operation long before he became the commander of the Beirut Battalion in June 2011. He did a research paper in 2005 on the subject when he was attending the Maneuver Captains

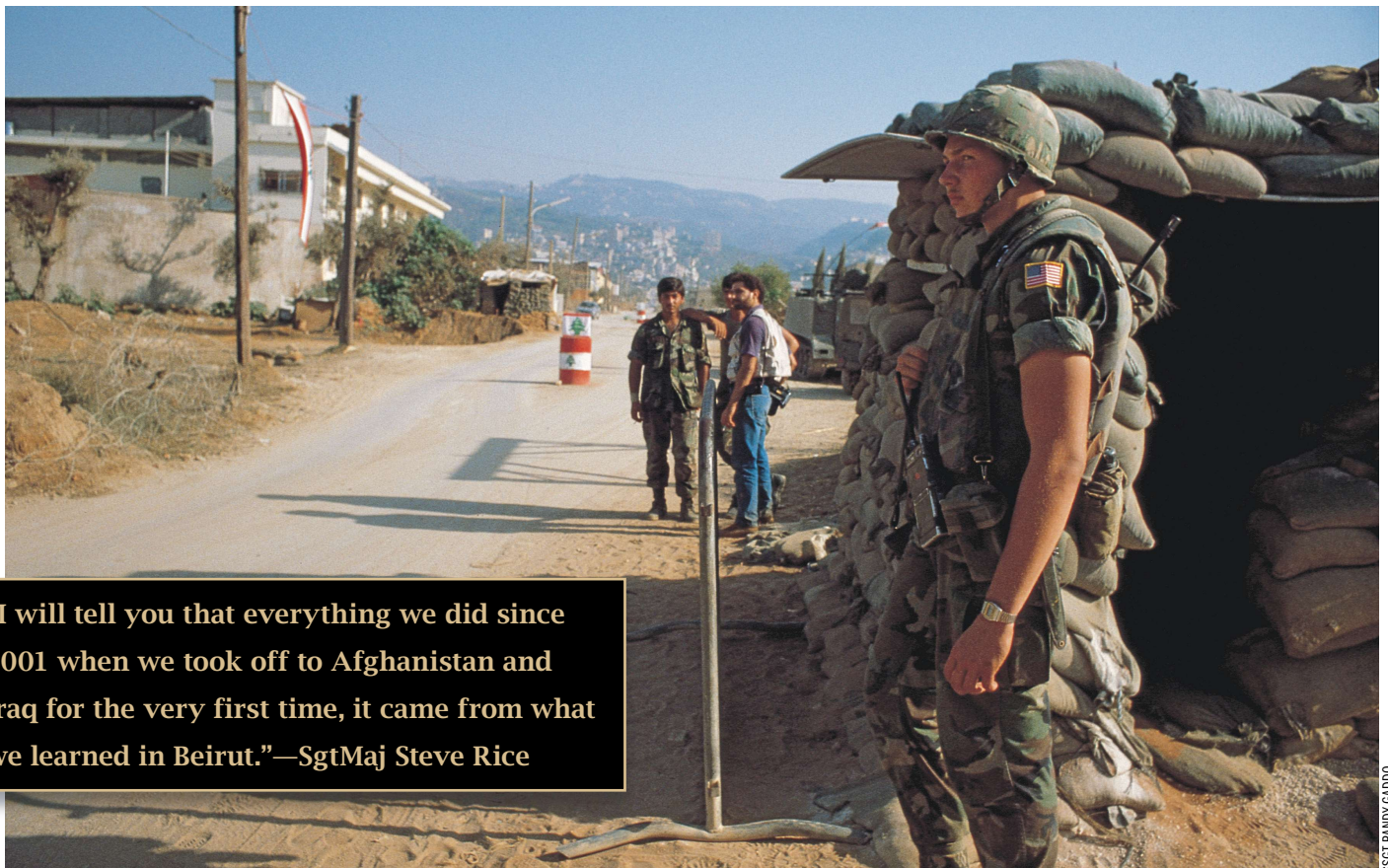
Career Course at Fort Benning, Ga.

“I was given the opportunity to pick my subject, and I said I wanted to do it on the Beirut bombing—I did the paper on 1/8,” he said, emphasizing that he wasn’t bound for 1/8 at that point in his career. “I wanted to look at the core roots of counterinsurgency, working in an environment where terrorists are trying to affect what we’re doing. Let’s find out what went right and what went wrong and learn from it.

“I pulled every source I could get my hands on related to the lessons learned there,” he said. “You have to train for the worst-case scenario, which is full-out combat, and then you have to be able to ramp up or down depending on the threat. In Afghanistan so much of it was the foot patrol and how do we deal with the IEDs [improvised explosive devices] people lay down in the dirt.”

SgtMaj Rice supported that perspective. “I will tell you that everything we did since 2001 when we took off to Afghanistan and Iraq for the very first time, it came from what we learned in Beirut,” he postulated. “You remember the serpentine going into any FOB? There wasn’t a straight shot to anything, and there were always eagle eyes on every position with fail safes and escalation-of-force procedures, and where did that come from? Beirut!”

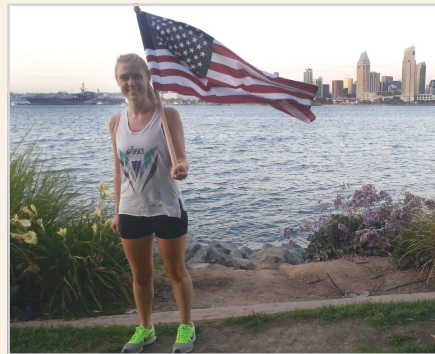
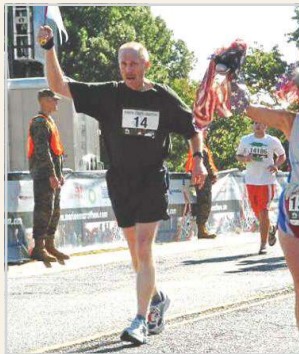
“The National Command Authority and the Marine Corps have taken the lessons



SSGT RANDY GADDO

“I will tell you that everything we did since 2001 when we took off to Afghanistan and Iraq for the very first time, it came from what we learned in Beirut.”—SgtMaj Steve Rice

A Marine with BLT 1/8 stands watch at a joint U.S./Lebanese Army checkpoint during 1/8’s peacekeeping operation in Beirut, 1983.



From left: Mike Chard with his youngest son, Nick, holding a Beirut Veterans of America flag at a previous Marine Corps Marathon; Mike Chard finishes the 2008 Marine Corps Marathon carrying a small BVA flag; and in San Diego, Alisa Chard trains for the 2013 Marine Corps Marathon carrying a U.S. flag. (Photos courtesy of Mike and Alisa Chard)

Running for a Reason: Beirut Veteran and Team Run in Memory of Marines Killed in Beirut

Beirut veteran Mike Chard and his three-member team will be among 30,000 runners stepping off for the 38th Marine Corps Marathon at 0755 on Sunday, 27 Oct., in Washington, D.C.

For the third time, Chard will run the marathon in remembrance of 270 military personnel killed in action during the Beirut operation, 1982-84. In 2003 and 2008, he did it alone; this year he will have help carrying a Beirut Veterans of America (BVA) banner, a BVA flag and an American flag.

His 25-year-old daughter, Alisa, will run with him. Alisa is a Navy ensign, a nurse newly assigned to the Wounded Warrior floor at the Naval Medical Center in San Diego. Chard, through Alisa, also has assistance from two Marine second lieutenants: Song Chen and Mark Dela Pena. The three young teammates met at their college Reserve Officers' Training Corps unit in New York.

Supporting Chard's small team in spirit will be thousands of families and veterans who will descend on Jacksonville, N.C., 21-23 Oct., for the 30th Beirut Remembrance. Each year since 1984, the city of Jacksonville has sponsored the Remembrance. The BVA, formed in 1992 with the motto "The First Duty Is To Remember," has become an integral part of the event.

Chard served in the Army from 1974 to 1977 as a military policeman and from 1979 to 1984 with Special Forces. In Beirut, Chard was the engineer sergeant for Scuba Detachment-232, "Charlie" Company, 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces from Fort Devens, Mass., a small contingent of American trainers and advisors sent to work with the Lebanese army.

"My own Beirut memories span June 1983 to April 1984. But October of 1983 holds a significance that weighs heavier than all others," he said.

Chard explained that in Beirut he and members of his unit were supported by Marine units who guarded the airport perimeter.

"We got together with the Marines periodically to barbeque a burger, drink a beer, trade stories and try to have a few laughs," he recalled. "As the fighting and shelling got heavier, that all changed since it became so hard to move around."

Chard will travel from his home in Anchorage, Alaska, to Jacksonville, to attend the 30th Beirut Remembrance, bringing the banner so families, friends and fellow military personnel

can sign it to support the effort. He will leave Jacksonville and meet his team in Washington.

The other three team members are scattered across the country and will run together for the first time when they take up their flags and banner at the marathon.

Ensign Chard noted that geographical dispersion is trumped by unity of purpose.

"When I'm training I think about carrying the flag and running next to my dad and those two Marines, and I run a little faster; I get chills sometimes thinking about it," revealed Chard, who ran the Marine marathon last year.

"There's definitely a correlation between what happened in Beirut, what happened on September 11, 2001, and the current global war on terrorism," observed 2dLt Dela Pena. "We're fighting that battle today, but we'll never forget the Marines who came before us," he noted from his home in New York, where he awaits an opening at The Basic School.

Second Lt Chen first ran the marathon in 2011 while still in college. "It's going to be a challenge, carrying the flags and banner for that distance," said Chen, who is attending communications officer school at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va. "But we've all run the marathon before; we're all in good shape, so we'll do well."

Since its inception in 1976, the Marine Corps Marathon has grown to be the fourth-largest U.S. marathon, its route lined with supportive spectators.

"The crowd has been amazing and helped me make it through the run in the past," recalled Mike Chard. "People would shout encouragement and thank me for my service. You can't fail with support like that."

Marathon organizers have been supporting Chard's effort, featuring it in their program magazine and highlighting it in various media events.

Remembering is the reason this "fire team size" group will bear the extra weight and pain together as they run among the monuments in the nation's capital.

Mike Chard captured the essence of the purpose, saying: "Those men lost in Beirut, if they were here today, they would be our neighbors and friends ... they would be husbands, fathers and grandfathers. America needed these men then, and America needs men like them now."

—CWO-4 Randy Gaddo, USMC (Ret)

learned from what we did in Beirut—and it's unfortunate because we lost some excellent Marines there—but we haven't forgotten, and we've taken what we've learned and improved how we do it," declared LtCol Trimble.

In 2006, by a historical twist of fate, 1/8 had the opportunity to exercise those lessons learned, again in Beirut.

The 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU, formerly called MAU), with 1/8 again embarked as the ground combat element, was afloat in the Mediterranean;

this time, its mission was clear—go into Beirut to evacuate American citizens. Nearly 23 years after Western forces stepped out of Beirut in 1984, 1/8 was stepping back in.

"Mission complete," declared Col Ron Johnson, commander of the 24th MEU in July 2006, as 1/8 Marines and other MEU elements evacuated the first Americans safely to Cyprus. By the time they packed up two weeks later, they had evacuated more than 14,000 Americans to safe havens.



Above: LtCol Larry Gerlach, the commanding officer of BLT 1/8, speaks with one of his Marines on post in Beirut during early October 1983.

Below: Marines and sailors assist as heavy equipment is brought in to help in rescue and recovery operations after the Beirut terrorist bombing, late October 1983.



Get in, complete the mission, get out—lesson learned.

But 1/8's history, which dates back to its activation in 1940, is resplendent with examples of missions that led to lessons learned. Why does Beirut stand out as a battalion *nom de guerre*?

"The sheer volume of such a catastrophic event where one battalion bore the brunt of it is what I think separates it from other events," suggested SgtMaj Rice. "In Afghanistan, it is a catastrophic event if we experience four KIAs [killed in action] in one vehicle, compared to the losses they experienced on that one day in 1983."

Col Geraghty contends that Western forces, and particularly Marines, were completing their mission and were having a positive effect on peace in the region. That is why Iran and Hezbollah, their proxy in Lebanon, targeted them.

"We were making a difference. That's why they had to attack us," said Col Geraghty. "We were providing the stability that was allowing the various factions in the military and the government to begin to pull together."

Geraghty is among thousands of others who remember those lost in Beirut each year on 23 Oct. at the Beirut Memorial in Jacksonville, N.C., where 1/8 is based. Annually since 1984, Jacksonville has remembered the fallen military personnel in Beirut, 270 KIA (including the 241 on 23 Oct.) during the course of the peacekeeping mission between 1982 and 1984.

During the 2012 remembrance, 1/8 Marines were instrumental in setting up the remembrance site at the Beirut Memorial. The memorial consists of a wall engraved with the names of all KIAs. Guarding a jagged break in the wall is a bronze statue of a lone, M16 rifle-bearing Marine sentry. The break in the wall represents the bomb-damaged walls of the barracks in Beirut, and the sentry guarding it is symbolic of the peacekeeping mission for which so many 1/8 Marines gave their lives.

Contemporary 1/8 Marines might not fully understand the impact that incident so long ago has on their lives today were it not for a command that ensures they do.

"The Marine Corps Installations East sergeant major had us all in a formation last week, and he told us he enlisted in the Marine Corps because of the Beirut bombing," said Sergeant Robert Hoover, from Jackson, Miss., who at that time had been with the battalion about three years.

SgtMaj Ernest K. Hoopii, the Marine Corps Installations East sergeant major, confirmed that story.

"I was 22, working a civilian job back home," said the Maui, Hawaii, native



CWO-4 RANDY GADDO, USMC (RET)



CPL ANDREW J. GOOD

Today's 1/8 Marines reflect the consistent quality of character embodied in Marines of yesterday's 1/8, in the view of the battalion commander in Beirut.

Above left: In October 2012, Sgt Robert Hoover leads a squad of 1/8 Marines, who are standing by behind the Beirut Memorial, waiting for their cue to support the 29th Beirut Remembrance in Jacksonville, N.C. The 30th anniversary Remembrance ceremony is set for 1030, 23 Oct. 2013.

Above right: Marines with 1/8 patrol in Helmand province, Afghanistan, during the battalion's 2012 deployment.

whose father and uncles served in the Corps during the Korean War. "One day I came home from work, CNN was on TV, and I saw all the names scrolling, and I was in shock. I thought, 'No way can we let this go.' I had some decisions to make, and I decided this was my calling." Hoopii enlisted in January 1984 and never looked back.

Sgt Hoover, one of many 1/8 Marines helping ensure that the 2012 remembrance ran smoothly, was placed in charge of the ceremonial detail.

"I think it means a lot that people remember this every year and there's such a big turnout, and it means a lot to us since we are 1st Battalion, 8th Marines," said Hoover, who reenlisted while on deployment to Afghanistan to stay with 1/8, as did Sgt Ben Santo from Columbus, Ohio.

Santo served with 1/8 for more than three years and has been at the Beirut remembrances in the past. "I've had family members [of the Beirut bombing victims] come up to me afterwards and thank us for remembering and honoring their serviceman," he recalled. "It really means a lot to them."

Even though these modern-day Marines didn't experience the Beirut bombing as SgtMaj Hoopii did, they do connect it to

other horrific events that can be traced directly back to it—the terrorist attacks of 11 Sept. 2001.

"I was in eighth grade," said Santo. "Every class we went to had it [TV coverage of the attacks] on that day. I remember thinking I was going to join the Marine Corps as soon as I could. I was still a senior when I enlisted, and I shipped to boot camp the summer after I graduated."

Today's 1/8 Marines reflect the consistent quality of character embodied in Marines of yesterday's 1/8, in the view of the battalion commander in Beirut.

"The Marines who served in 1/8 in Beirut were fine examples of the best that America has to offer," declared LtCol Larry Gerlach, commanding officer of 1/8 in 1983. "They were sharp, well-trained, motivated and dedicated to the noble mission we were given."

Gerlach was injured seriously in the bombing and still suffers from those injuries today, but his admiration for Beirut Battalion Marines' performance has never wavered.

"They demonstrated incredible tenacity and ingenuity in performing duties under conditions that changed from friendly to hostile, from warm smiles to rockets," he observed. "I was proud to serve with the

men of 1/8 in 1983, and I'm just as proud of them today.

"Peacekeeping was an incredibly difficult and fluid mission and didn't reflect the actual changing conditions on the ground. Nonetheless, they remained faithful to the mission, and they did a truly outstanding job. I believe that today's 1/8 Marines are carrying on the tradition that Marines have carried for generations—accomplish the mission—and the fact that they carry on as the Beirut Battalion honors the Marines who came before them."

Today, 1/8's new motto is "We Are 1/8," collectively encompassing myriad missions of the past, present and future. But this year in October, as the names of so many of their predecessors are read from the wall of the Beirut Memorial, Marines of the Beirut Battalion will be there 30 years later, standing tall at the 1030, 23 Oct. ceremony, and they will remember.

Editor's note: The author, retired CWO-4 Randy Gaddo, served with the 24th MAU in Beirut during the time of the Beirut bombing. He is founding vice president and serving board member of the Beirut Veterans of America and a contributing editor for Leatherneck magazine.

