



232nd USMC Birthday Celebrants at Tallil, aka LSA Adder and Camp Adder. (Courtesy photo by Clayton Waller)

U.S. Marine Corps Birthday celebrants at Tallil include USACE personnel

By John Connor
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TALLIL, Iraq – On this spacious military base in southern Iraq, amid thousands of U.S. Army and Air Force personnel and Australian and Romanian troops, a band of 20 men gathered on Nov. 10 to celebrate the 232nd Birthday of the United States Marine Corps.

The traditional ceremony included a reading of the Commandant's Birthday Message and a cake cutting involving the oldest and youngest Marines present.

The youngest, Benjamin Young, later spoke briefly but movingly of a comrade wounded in Iraq. Young, like most of those in attendance, currently wears the uniform of the U.S. Army. But as the saying goes, there's no such thing as an ex-Marine.

Marine Corps Commandant James Conway's message was read in its entirety by an organizer of the event, Paul O'Friel, a Lt. Col. in the Marine Corps Reserve. "On our 232nd Birthday, to every Marine—those still in uniform and those who have

served honorably in the past—be proud of what you are and what you do,” Gen. Conway said in part. “Know your citizenship dues have been paid in full....”

Those attending the Tallil ceremony listened attentively as O’Friel read Gen. Conway’s words, including the general’s remembrance of the wheat fields of Belleau Wood, the snows of the Chosin, the streets of Hue. They later stood at attention for the Marine Corps Hymn and then Taps, in honor of fallen comrades.

Several of those present wore civilian clothes. Among them were O’Friel, a State Department Foreign Service Officer who heads the Muthanna Province Reconstruction Team, and Jeff Stanton, a governance specialist on the Muthanna team, as well as Clayton Waller and John Connor (the oldest present), both civilian employees of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Most wore the uniform of the U.S. Army; men who for one reason or another switched branches but were proud to have once worn the uniform of the U.S. Marine Corps and were proud to join in celebrating another Corps birthday. (No active duty Marines were present because there are not any serving here, although one Soldier received a special dispensation from his Sgt. Major to don Marine garb for the occasion. And yes, a Soldier of long military service was heard to say, ‘I never should have left the Corps”).

One distinguished American, the late Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, D-Mont., was a big-time military branch switcher. He served as a young man in three branches of the U.S. Armed Forces—in order of service, in the Navy, the Army, and the Marine Corps.

Mansfield returned to Montana after the Marines, got married, caught up on his schooling, went into politics, and eventually became the leader of the U.S. Senate. After the Senate, he served as U.S. Ambassador to Japan. His grave marker in Arlington Cemetery bears the simple inscription, “Michael J. Mansfield, PFC., U.S. Marine Corps.”

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