



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FAYETTE COUNTY CELEBRATES 250TH BIRTHDAY OF MARINE CORPS

Uniontown, PA - As long as there has been America, there have been Marines.

The United States Marine Corps was founded by a resolution of the Continental Congress on Nov. 10, 1775. On Monday, Fayette County Veterans Affairs Director Tommy Boyd, himself a former Marine, gathered with other retired members of the corps at the former Gallatin Bank Building in Uniontown to observe and honor the USMC's 250th birthday.

Boyd said a cake-cutting ceremony is a traditional part of a Marine birthday celebration. It is customary for the youngest Marine present to cut the cake and offer the first bite to the oldest Marine, who then takes a bite and hands it back. Boyd observed this tradition with respect and ceremony, right down to the knife he used.

Boyd said the K-bar knife came to him by way of a former coworker and fellow Marine who passed away following his service. The young man's father gave the ceremonial K-bar from the USMC's 200th birthday in 1975 to Boyd following his son's passing.

Boyd cut the cake with the K-bar and passed the first piece to ex-Marine Jim Burkholder.

Boyd and Burkholder were joined at the celebration by a number of former Marines, including former Veterans Affairs Director Brian Bensen, as well as a group of longtime friends who became close while in the corps.

Kevin and Joni Crossland of Uniontown heard about the celebration from Butch Riggin, a longtime friend who also resides in Uniontown. Sheri Whittington of North Carolina and Rob Gardner of South Dakota were visiting the Crosslands and decided to attend the ceremony with them.

Riggin said he and Crossland were friends before their days in the Marine Corps, in which they both served from 1987 to 1992. Riggin, a small arms repairman in the armory, and Crossland, a metalsmith who worked on F-4 and F-18 combat aircraft, both ended up stationed in Hawaii for a time. Gardner, who also worked on F-4s and F-18s in hydraulics, as well as Joni Crossland and Whittington, who worked on weapons systems, also were in Hawaii at the same time.

"We were all in the same squadron," Gardner said. "That's when we all became friends."

Joni Crossland said the camaraderie to be found in the Marine Corps was one of her favorite things about her service.

"Camaraderie, faithfulness and forever friends," she said. "It's where I met my husband."

Whittington said she and Joni Crossland have been best friends since First Schooling, which comes after basic training. She said being a Marine means “honor, pride, and being one of the few,” and it also gave her “the best friends you could ever have. I could make one call and say, ‘I need you,’ and they would be there.”

Kevin Crossland also spoke of the pride, honor and discipline that comes with being a U.S. Marine, but he couldn’t fail to mention the closeness that comes with it as well.

“It’s a brotherhood, a sisterhood,” he said.

Gardner said of all the things he has accomplished in life, including earning a college degree and owning his own business,, “The thing I’m most proud of is the Marine Corps.”

Riggin’s time in the Marine Corps can be summed up in a few words.

“Best thing I ever did,” he said.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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