

(U) Cryptologic Almanac 50th Anniversary Series

(U) NSA's "Own" Marine Guards 15 November 1953-29 September 1978

(U) They were, to say the least, resplendent. From the sparkling white cap cover and pistol belt, khaki shirt, and blue trousers to the spit-shined shoes, they were lithe young men, who spoke little but did so much to keep us safe. Who were they? NSA's "Own" Marine guards!

(U) The Marine Barracks, Ft. George G. Meade, was established by a secretary of defense memorandum dated 9 June 1953. The Marines' mission was to provide local security for the National Security Agency. The authorized strength of the Marine Security Guard was 5 officers and 144 enlisted men.

(U) Lieutenant General Ralph J. Canine, the first DIRNSA, considered the Federal Protective Service guards, who protected other federal installations, not to be up to guarding NSA and its vital national secrets. The FPS guards were chosen from the ranks of retired military and police, some of whom had partial disabilities. Canine argued that the younger, more physically and mentally fit Marines were the perfect answer to NSA's security needs.

(U) A decade later, Canine's sagacity was borne out by a survey conducted by NSA's Office of Security. Another sensitive government agency reported difficulty in clearing its civilian security guards for CRYPTO; 95 percent of them could be cleared for only the SECRET level. The civilian guards had a high turnover rate and a high rate of absenteeism. These last two factors meant that there could be no standby emergency reaction force and led to a delay in reaction time. The guard force was unionized, and extreme care had to be taken in disciplining them. NSA also experienced problems in clearing a sufficient number of contract guards for its record repository at Ft. Holabird, MD. It was usually not possible for the men attracted to these positions to obtain a security clearance.¹

(U) The Marines, while not highly paid, possessed two qualities that the civilian guards apparently lacked: discipline and professionalism. At least some of them had training and experience as Marine security guards, guarding United States embassies around the world. Companies "A" and "B" comprised over 200 Marines. They manned over 75 interior and exterior posts at the Ft. Meade and Friendship Annex (FANX) complexes, as well as mobile patrols, between 8 and 11 hours out of every 24. Beginning 5 hours before taking

post in the building, they were part of the alert force, located in the barracks, ready to respond instantly to local emergency. Lower ranking Marines stood a fixed post, while noncommissioned officers (NCOs), corporals, and sergeants manned communications and alarm monitors in the Panel Room or supervised the guards on post or on roving patrol. NCOs with special access were assigned as security inspectors. A commissioned officer served as duty officer, in command of the guard force. During VIP visits or special events, Marines standing guard at key entry points wore the full dress blue uniform. When not standing guard, the Marines were training, in order to maintain their skills as light weapons infantrymen.

(U) Still, they found time to participate in community affairs. One of these was the Ft. McHenry Guard, a 50-man drill team and drum and bugle corps, composed entirely of volunteers from the guard force. During warm weather, the Ft. McHenry Guard performed a traditional Tattoo ceremony at Baltimore's Ft. McHenry.² The impressive ceremony featured drill and music of the early 1800s. At each performance, a prominent personality, usually local, was chosen as an "Honorary Ft. McHenry Colonel" and served as the reviewing officer or honored guest. This activity earned the Marines two Freedom Foundation Awards and authorization to carry the colors of the City of Baltimore when parading in that city. They were also recognized as "Baltimore's Own Marine Barracks."³ The Marine guard also found time to support "Toys for Tots" and other charitable activities.

(U) There were more awards to come - the Marine Barracks, Ft. Meade, won a Meritorious Unit Citation in 1970, an award rarely given to a "peacetime" Marine unit, according to Colonel C. W. Blythe, commander of the Marine Barracks. When formally presenting the award on 2 June of that year, General Leonard F. Chapman, commandant of the Marine Corps, extolled the Marines' "exceptional professional competence in fulfillment of their security role" and "the example they have set in developing the military-civilian team spirit throughout the National Security Agency." The Marine Barracks, Ft. Meade, was designated a Bicentennial Command by HQ, United States Marine Corps, for their participation in the Ft. McHenry Guard. The only other Marine Corps element to gain this distinction was "Eight and Eye" (HQ, USMC) itself.

(U) In 1972 the deputy secretary of defense, citing diminishing enlistments and budget, decided to withdraw the Marine support for NSA. Despite a vigorous reclama by DIRNSA, it turned out to be a no-win situation, and the Marines left as ordered. The Marine Barracks officially closed on 30 June 1978. But they left behind a "legacy" - sub-unit 1, Alfa Company, Marine Support Battalion. They continued to stand post until 22 September and provided the Alert Force until 29 September 1978.⁴ NSA's "Own" Marines were unique, highly professional, and a credit to the United States Marine Corps.

Footnotes

(U) ¹ Memorandum, Chief, M52 to Chief, D323, 28 May 1963.

(U) ² Tattoo is a tradition passed to us from the British Army. The ceremony is that of a formal guard mount which occurs just before posting the guard at the end of the day. It signals those who have no business in a fort or barracks to withdraw before the gates are secured and sentinels posted, and for troops not on duty to retire to their quarters. The word "tattoo" itself is believed to derive from the phrase "tap toe" (to "toe" or close the tap on a keg of spirits). In its display of prowess in drill, and its accompanying music, Tattoo is a signal no one can mistake.

(U) ³ Richardson, Herb; "Leatherneck" magazine; February 1977

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

(U) ⁴ Hackman, Neil; "SOUNDOFF"; 28 November 1978

[(U//FOUO) Center for Cryptologic History, 972-2893s,]

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