

The Lance Corporal Rank-USMC

History Of The L/Cpl Rank In The USMC

<http://www.expage.com/page/lcpl>

By

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<http://www.angelfire.com/ca/dickg/gunny.html>

Postal 0161 (1952-72)

The following is an explanation on the background and history of the title of Lance Corporal as presently used by the U.S. Marine Corps for its Marines serving in that rank/grade between Private First Class and Corporal. This information has been reviewed from available sources as indicated; it is intended as an explanation as to how the present use of the Lance Corporal rank in the USMC came about, but it is not intended as a treatise on the title of Lance Corporal in general as used by other armed forces of the world throughout history.

"From 1908 until the armistice of 11 November 1918, there were but two major changes in the Marine Corps enlisted rank structure. By 1 January 1914, the Gunnery Sergeant had been returned to the top pay grade along with the Sergeant Major, Drum Major, Quartermaster Sergeant, and First Sergeant; **(115)** and in 1917, the grade of Private First Class was authorized. **(116)**

In requesting the Secretary of the Navy to approve the grade of Private First Class, the Commandant based his argument on the fact that the Army had established a similar grade the previous year. Since the organization of the Marine Corps, at least for expeditionary service, was much like that of the Army, the Commandant felt that the new grade was necessary. **(117)** The Secretary of the Navy agreed; and the coming of the Private First Class sounded the death knell of another Marine Corps tradition, for the new rank ended the usefulness of the Lance Corporal.

Lance Corporals and Lance Sergeants had been a part of the Marine Corps as far back as the 1830s and probably even earlier. **(118)** By 1877, the practice of detailing Corporals to act as Sergeants and Privates to assume the duties of Corporals had become so widespread that the Commandant directed that such appointments be only one month in duration. If, at the end of that time, the individual could not pass an examination for the grade in which he was serving temporarily, his appointment should go to someone else. **(119)** In spite of the creation of the Private First Class, Lance rank died hard. A chevron for Lance Corporal appeared in uniform regulations of 1929 **(120)** and one writer on Marine Corps tradition asserts that privates were being detailed lance corporals as recently as 1937. **(121)**"

*"...reemphasis on the role of the senior noncommissioned officers was followed by a sweeping revision of the enlisted ranks and grades of the Marine Corps in 1958, after Congress amended the Career Compensation Act of 1949 and authorized two new pay grades, (E-8) and (E-9). **(174)** This revision was designed to relieve the crowding at the E-7 grade, caused by the rapid World War II output of noncommissioned officers and, since then, by the moving up--appropriately enough--of the specifically skilled men which every service was requiring more and more. The end result, however, was an unbalanced structure, too heavy at the top."*

"A transitional period of dual grade structures, to end entirely on 1 January 1965, was worked out to insure that no Marine would lose stripes. This was achieved by establishing "acting" ranks, so that all Marines would be able to retain their existing titles, insignia, and privileges. Upon promotion, they would assume the new rank titles. The prefix "acting," however, was abolished by the Commandant on 1 August 1960, and the end of the transitional period for all grades was moved up to 1 July 1963. **(179)**

In this revision of 1958, the ranks of Corporal through Master Sergeant were upgraded one pay grade each, making room for an

additional private rank. The Sergeant Major/First Sergeant program was retained, with its historic command prestige, but a new technical leadership was introduced into the top NCO levels, in recognition of the ever-increasing complexity of waging modern warfare, by permitting E-8 and E-9 billets to be filled also by occupational specialists. Since technical adeptness was now required of quite a few others besides the Technical Sergeant, this title ceased to have value and it was deleted. Marines holding that rank were designated acting Gunnery Sergeants."

[1]

"The rank of Corporal was placed in pay grade E-4 in order to preserve his status as the junior NCO in the Marine Corps. The rank of Sergeant with three stripes, formerly E-4, was selected to replace the rank of Staff Sergeant at E-5, in order to have two ranks of NCOs and to remove one rank from the ranks of staff NCOs which would start at Staff Sergeant in pay grade E-6. Personnel holding the rank of Staff Sergeant would carry the title of acting Staff Sergeant until promoted."

"The occasion also enabled the Marine Corps to reapply its colorful history to the grade structure. The title of Lance Corporal, first used by the Marines in the Indian Wars of 1830s was revived. Now, for the first time, it was a permanent rank. In addition, the memorable "gunny" -- the Gunnery Sergeant and the Master Gunnery Sergeant--was exhumed."

Note: The above quotes and those on the preceding page pertain to Reference 1, on Page Nos. 2&3

Note: The following is from the rank/insignia pages of the the book, "US Marine Corps In World War I 1917-1918," which contains an abundance of useful information for Marines, e.g. Organization, Uniforms, Aviators, Insignia/Decorations, Weapons and Equipment, Rank Chart, etc.

"Marine NCOs wore forest green chevrons on red backing patches

on both arms of their P1917 coats. While many retained their chevrons and buttons when converting to the Army M1912 tunic, some inevitably came to use Army drab stripes. Early in 1918 the AEF authorized the wear of chevrons on the right sleeve only, and this soon became the standard. Late in the war the Marine Corps began to use the rank of Private First Class (PFC), but the prescribed crossed rifles insignia for this rank were not available in France until 1919.

The temporary titles of Lance Corporal or Lance Sergeant were also used during the war; these semi-official ranks were awarded as a sort of brevet to Marines who were serving as acting Corporals or Sergeants. The single stripe of Lance Corporal rank was formally authorized only for full dress use."

Note: The above quote pertains to Reference No. 2 on Pages No. 2&3

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[2]

Why this Site?

I have been questioned time and again, over the years, regarding the Lance Corporal rank in the Marine Corps. Many of these questions coming from Marines who were either retired or discharged prior to

1958 when this new rank became officially established in the Corps. And, too, once I had my own Marine website online, e-mail would turn up now and then with the same questions: What is a Lance Corporal? Is this an NCO grade? Is there both a Corporal and a Lance Corporal grades, etc.? And I have also seen these questions being discussed, but never fully answered, on various Marine Message Boards/Forums around the Net.

Because of this I decided finally to research the matter myself, and post something regarding it. It was an eye-opener for me; I had seen all those movies, and books too, of foreign armed forces (mostly British), with the term lance corporal being used. But I'd had no idea that this rank had such a history within our own Corps. I have already stated that the scope of this writing was limited to that of the U.S. Marine Corps; however, I will point out that I found one reference to the present existence of the Lance Corporal rank now alive and well in the Royal Marines. See the website, **(Reference 3)** "Royal Marine Ranks Compared With US Marines."

I am sure that the interested reader can easily research this subject and find other examples as well.

REFERENCES (below)

1. U.S. Marine Corps Ranks And Grades 1775-1969, Historical Division HQMC 1970
2. US Marine Corps In World War I 1917-1918, Mark Henry Darko Pavlovic, Osprey 1999
3. Royal Marine Ranks Compared With US Marines
4. Diary Of An Iraqui Lance Corporal
5. The Origin of Ranks/Insignia Used By U.S. Armed Forces

[3]
<http://www.usmc.mil/>

- End GySgt Gaines article -

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#### **Enlisted**

- E-1 Private
- E-2 Private First Class (PFC)

- E-3 Lance Corporal
- E-4 Corporal
- E-5 Sergeant
- E-6 Staff Sergeant
- E-7 Gunnery Sergeant
- E-8 First Sergeant or Master Sergeant
- E-9 Sergeant Major or Master Gunnery Sergeant



**Private First Class (PFC)**  
**Pay grade E2**



**Lance Corporal (LCpl)**  
**Pay grade E3**



**Corporal (CPL)**  
**Pay grade E4**



**Sergeant (Sgt)**  
**Pay grade E5**



**Staff Sergeant (SSgt)**  
**Pay grade E6**



**Gunnery Sergeant (GySgt)**  
**Pay grade E7**



**Master Sergeant (Msgt)**  
**Pay grade E8**



**First Sergeant (1SG)**  
**Pay grade E8**



**Sergeant Major (SgtMaj)**  
**Pay grade E9**



**Master Gunnery Sergeant (MGySgt)**  
**Pay grade E9**



**Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps (SgtMajMC)**  
**Pay grade E9**

**Warrant Officers**

- Warrant Officer 1 (WO)
- Chief Warrant Officer 2 (CWO2)
- Chief Warrant Officer 3 (CWO3)
- Chief Warrant Officer 4 (CWO4)
- Chief Warrant Officer (CWO5)

**Warrant Officer 1 (WO)**



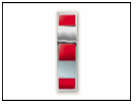
**Chief Warrant Officer 2 (CWO2)**



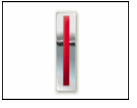
**Chief Warrant Officer 3 (CWO3)**



**Chief Warrant Officer 4 (CWO4)**



**Chief Warrant Officer (CWO5)**



**Officers**

- O-1 Second Lieutenant
- O-2 First Lieutenant
- O-3 Captain
- O-4 Major
- O-5 Lieutenant Colonel
- O-6 Colonel

- O-7 Brigadier General
- O-8 Major General
- O-9 Lieutenant General
- O-10 General