



3 September 2020

Marines and Sailors,

I am extremely proud of your performance during this most recent Annual Training season and during non-traditional drills in the months leading up to Annual Training. There was every reason not to conduct Annual Training this year. In fact, others elected to limit Annual Training to mostly virtual training or to skip it all together. We were determined that we had the small unit leadership in place that could figure out, and then execute the continuing actions required to protect the force while also training our Marines & Sailors. You did just that. The challenge in front of us is to enhance our training in the coming year regardless of the difficulties COVID presents.

We exist for one reason and one reason only: To be ready to respond when the nation needs us in order to win battles. This takes hard training and informed decision making. Everyone must play their position; including me. Therefore, I have weighed all of the risks and our obligations and have decided to cancel all Marine Forces Reserve Birthday Ball celebrations for this year. Large scale events involving invited guests are important to our overall culture, but they do not directly contribute to our warfighting readiness. When they introduce unacceptable risk to the force and to the public, we make professional decisions accordingly.

Therefore, we will recognize our 245<sup>th</sup> birthday, as is our tradition every November. We will adhere to the spirit of the Marine Corps order, which calls for the annual reading of Commandant John A. Lejeune's birthday message and sharing a piece of birthday cake between the oldest and youngest Marine present.

For most of us who have had the opportunity to deploy in times of crises, our most precious memories of this birthday have been in austere or hostile locations. These memories inevitably include very intimate birthday celebrations led by small unit leaders but earned and felt by all. This year will be no different.

As a result, we will both protect and fortify the force so that we are ready to fight and win when the nation calls.

Semper Fidelis,

David G. Bellon  
Lieutenant General, U.S. Marine Corps  
Commander, Marine Forces Reserve