

# *Roots in Ripon*

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*Chuck Roots*

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## Marine Corps Museum

As part of our two weeks of travel, Isaura and I drove from our Brats Reunion in Huntsville, Alabama to my brother's home in Great Falls, Virginia (608 miles). Such visits with my brother John, whether he comes to California, or I go to Virginia, is always an occasion for numerous rounds of golf!

We had the opportunity to visit with a number of friends here in Virginia, some we haven't seen in many years. All visits were centered around food and laughs. One of the Brats I saw in Huntsville last week I had not seen in 53 years! It just so happens that he and his family live in Great Falls! So, we met at a Mexican restaurant, El Tio, in Great Falls. Steve and Laura Robinson are a delightful couple. She and Isaura were chatting non-stop the whole evening.

We decided to spend a day to ourselves last Thursday, so we drove to Quantico, Virginia to visit the National Museum of the Marine Corps. I had visited this museum not long after it opened in 2006. However, since then it has been expanded which now includes a portrayal of all the wars the Marines have fought in. Initially, it covered World War Two through Vietnam because veterans of those wars could see their own history. The museum boasts more than 500,000 visitors a year.

The day we visited was a bright, sunny day so the hour-long drive was a pleasure. The museum is self-guided, allowing time to pause at various points of interest. In my initial planning for this outing, I figured we'd be there two, or maybe three hours which would include lunch. Boy! Was I mistaken.

The museum opens at 10:00 am, so we figured to be there when it opened. When we left it was already getting close to 4:30. We started by watching a 13-minute video introducing the museum and how it came to be. "The Museum is a public-private partnership between the U.S. Marine Corps and the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation." We then sat in on a 45-minute film which took you through the training regimen of a Marine. Having experienced this first hand nearly 50 years ago, I just smiled as I recalled the various rigors of boot camp followed by infantry combat training. My wife, on the other hand, was stunned to near silence. She had no idea just how harsh and brutal the training is in the making of a Marine. But then again, war is a nasty business. Perhaps a comment on one of the placards says it best. "For Marines, 'First to Fight' is both a promise and a point of pride. Readiness for rapid deployment and sudden violence demands strict discipline and tough training."

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Hanging from the apexed ceiling of the main concourse are a World War I bi-plane which is the first war where airplanes were used in combat. Another suspended plane was the F4U which was used by Marines in World War II.

Each of the wars Marines were engaged in had their own section which you could walk through. They were designed to make you feel as though you were right there. Even the Korean War exhibit was closed off, requiring you to enter through a door because they created a very cold environment, simulating the bitter cold Marines faced during the running battle known as the Chosin Reservoir. Those Marines who fought there are known as "The Frozen Chosin". So serious was the situation for the First Marine Regiment at Chosin that the commanding general, Marine icon, Chesty Puller, said, "We're surrounded . . . that simplifies our problem."

The Vietnam War section had you walking through the aft end of a CH46 troop transport helicopter into the rice paddies of 'Nam. You could even smell the hydraulic fluid which is so much a part of helicopter flight. The attempt to make this as realistic as possible was well done.

We did have lunch at the Tun Tavern, a spinoff of the original Tun Tavern in Philadelphia where the first Marines were recruited on what is now the Marine Corps Birthday, November 10, 1775. Next month will be the Marines' 242<sup>nd</sup> birthday. One of the items we ordered for lunch was an appetizer: Deep Fried Pickle Chips! Yum! The food was excellent, as was the service.

We finished by wandering through the Art Gallery, portraying combat art by Marines, some professional, but most were created by men in the midst of combat.

Having taught Marine Corps history while still in the Marine Corps Reserve, I found I was learning many things all over again in addition to adding to my knowledge of Marine Corps history and lore. It was a great experience.

If you find yourself in the Washington D.C. area, make it a point to visit this museum. And it's free. You'll be glad you did!