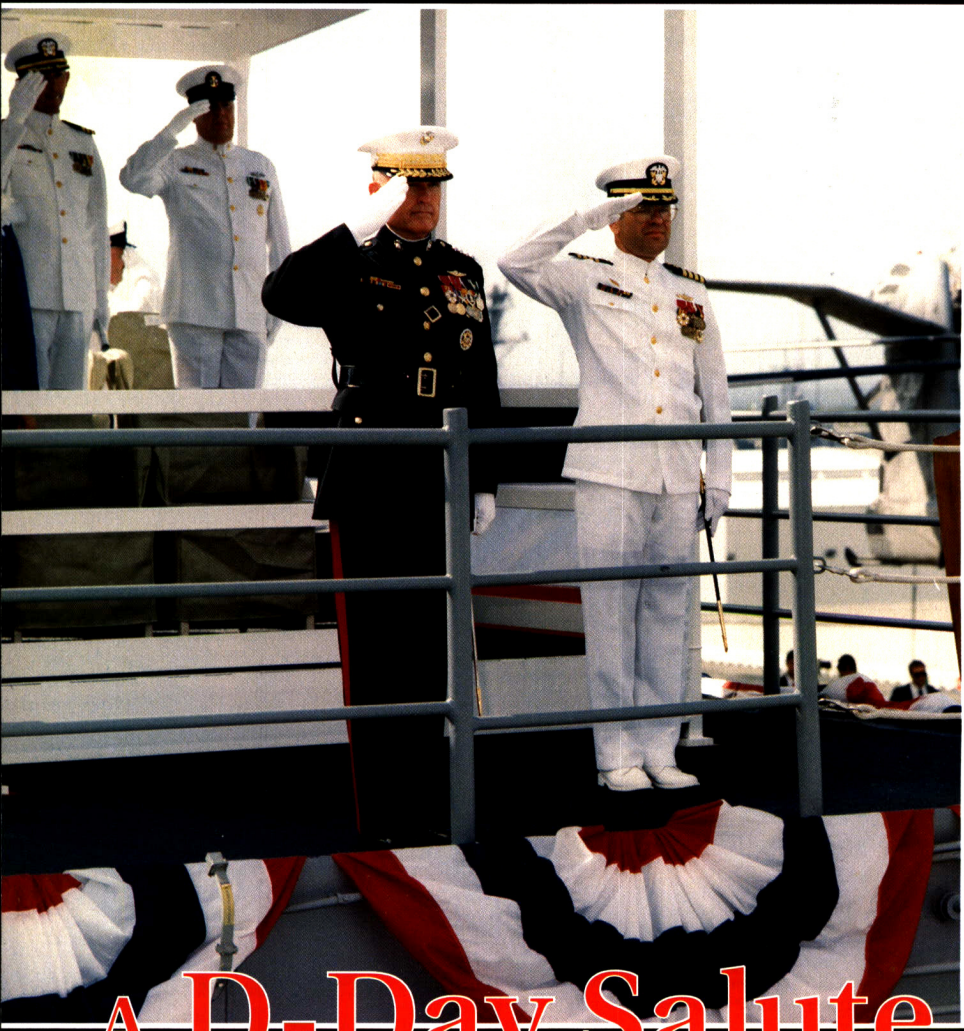


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As CMC, Gen Carl E. Mundy Jr. participated in numerous ceremonial events like the D-Day commemoration in Portsmouth, England, in 1994. Here he is pictured accepting "Honors" during the commissioning ceremonies for USS *Kearsarge* (LHD-3) in October 1993.



A D-Day Salute To the U.S. Marines

By Gen Carl E. Mundy Jr., USMC (Ret)

As the 65th anniversary of D-Day is upon us, I'm reminded of a significant salute to U.S. Marines that occurred during the 50th anniversary.

Several months before the commemorative events in the United Kingdom and on the beaches of Normandy, I received a call from my British counterpart, the Commandant General Royal Marines. Major General Robin Ross advised me that his Corps had been given responsibility for one of the more colorful events of the commemoration. It was to be conducted on the green overlooking the British D-Day memorial with Portsmouth harbor as the backdrop in which the international armada of warships would be at anchor before getting underway to cross the English Channel.

In addition to thousands of veterans, 16 heads of state of the nations who participated in Operation Overlord would be in attendance accompanied by their ministers of defense, chiefs of service, and commanders of all major formations, which had been part of the D-Day landing still in existence. For the United States, this meant President and Mrs. William Clinton, Secretary of Defense William Perry, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and commanders of the American divisions, air corps elements and Navy forces whose colors were still active. These and their allied counterparts would number almost 200 generals and admirals together with their defense ministers and heads of state. Attendance at the event was expected to be 250,000 persons.

MajGen Ross went on to describe the event as a "Drumhead Ceremony," one of those stunning exhibitions of military pageantry in which the British excel. The ceremony hailed from ancient times and involved the creation of an *ad hoc* altar around which the formations of troops about to go into battle were formed. Their regimental battle colors were ceremoniously laid on the altar, and a religious service blessing the formations and their colors followed. In more modern times, the drums of a regimental or division band were used to form the altar after the troop formations were paraded into line. Thus, the term, "Drumhead Ceremony."

The Commandant General continued that the ceremonial units would be made up of the Band of the Royal Marines, a large ceremonial platoon of

Royal Marines, and a formation of massed colors of all participating units. "Carl," he concluded, "I want to ask you for a ceremonial platoon of U.S. Marines to be included in the ceremony."

I responded that his request was a great honor, but reminded him that absent a few Marine detachments on the U.S. capital ships in the landing, American Marines had not played a major part in the invasion, and that he might be better served to get a U.S. Army unit. His response was firm: "This is going to be a Marine Corps event, and I want your Marines alongside mine." With-

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out further discussion, I assured him that we would provide the platoon.

Colonel Pete Metzger, commanding 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, was to be embarked in the amphibious ships of the U.S. Navy's D-Day Fleet '94, the U.S. contingent of warships in the international armada. The MEU was tasked to provide the ceremonial platoon, and Col Metzger, being a former Marine Barracks Washington, "8th & I" officer, saw to it that a platoon was formed, outfitted in blue dress uniforms, and drilled to the perfection expected of an "8th & I" formation.

The ceremony was one day prior to the actual D-Day anniversary, and 5 June 1994 was a perfect day in Portsmouth, England, with blue skies, calm waters in the harbor, and a crowd of patriotic attendees that not only met the 250,000-persons estimate, but had to be constrained to that number. The occasion was "high dress" with military attendees from the nations in their most formal, bemedaled uniforms. The official party, composed of heads of state, was seated on an elevated platform flanked on either side by bleachers seating we uniformed military attendees. At the appointed time, the Marine band struck up martial music and, followed by the two ceremonial platoons—Royal Marines leading and U.S. Marines in trail with massed regimental colors between—marched onto the expanse of green before the dignitaries and formed the line of troops.

Drummers from the band then moved forward, detached their drums and formed the ceremonial altar. The

massed color bearers then moved single-file to the altar where they draped their colors and retired back into formation. A moving sermon was then delivered by the Archbishop of Canterbury reminding all in attendance of the significance of this day, 50 years ago, remembering the fallen, and acknowledging the array of colors that had led the formations into battle.

At the conclusion of the religious ceremony, to the continuing strains of "pomp and circumstance" music by the Marine band, the color bearers recovered their colors and returned to

the mass formation. Drummers marched forward to recover their drums and moved back into ranks. The band then reversed position from the right to the left, left of the line of troops, to lead the formation past the reviewing platform and off the field. This placed the platoon of U.S. Marines as the lead element in the column of troops.

The drum major raised and then dropped his mace to commence the march-off, and the band and column of troops stepped off to the strains of "The Marines' Hymn." I was caught by surprise by this gracious tribute from the Royal Marines and, turning to my British counterpart, said, "Robin, the tradition of my Corps is to stand for its hymn, and I must do so."

As I stood, MajGen Ross came to attention beside me. Noting the movement behind him, Secretary of Defense Bill Perry turned and, seeing the two of us standing, followed suit. Within moments, undoubtedly wondering why, every allied officer in the bleachers rose. Queen Elizabeth II, noting the officers rising on either side of the platform, stood up, prompting the other 15 heads of state also to stand.

It was a moment in history: 250,000 spectators and 16 heads of state standing as a proud platoon of U.S. Marines—each an inch taller than he had been moments before—stepped off the field to the strains of their hymn.

Editor's note: General Mundy is the 30th Commandant of the Marine Corps.

