

# MARINES ON PARADE

By VIRGINIA KELLY



*Reprinted from Reader's Digest*

**Front Cover:**

*The Color Guard, bearing the Stars and Stripes and the Marine battle flag, starts the March on the Colors*

*One of the  
most stirring sights  
in America*

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AT PRECISELY 8:20 every Friday evening from mid-May through mid-September, an officer in red tunic marches briskly down the center walk at the Marine Corps barracks in Washington, D.C.—and the Evening Parade begins. It is one of the most spectacular shows in our land, a stirring performance of music, marching and drills staged by the U.S. Marine Corps in an incomparable setting. Each week 2000 to 3000 people attend, admission-free.

Thomas Jefferson chose the site for the Evening Parade when he established the Marine barracks here in 1801. The parade ground, slightly larger than a football field, is flanked by carefully spaced oak and chestnut trees. On the east side, a ten-foot-high box hedge frames the faded red brick barracks. At the north end is the commandant's white brick residence, the oldest public building in continuous use in Washington. The summer sky is still light when the

outdoor show begins, and dark when it ends, exactly one hour and 40 minutes later.

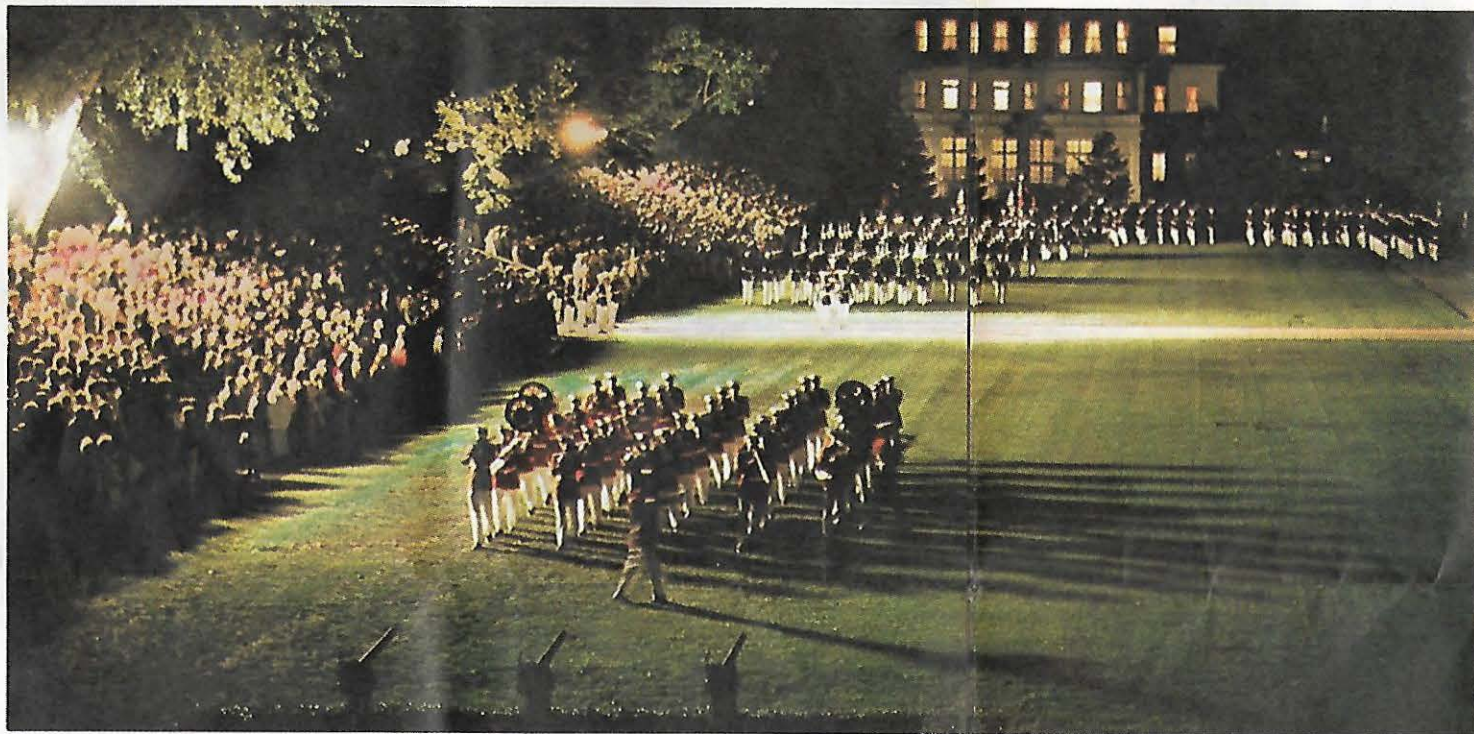
A band concert starts the evening. The Marine band, known as



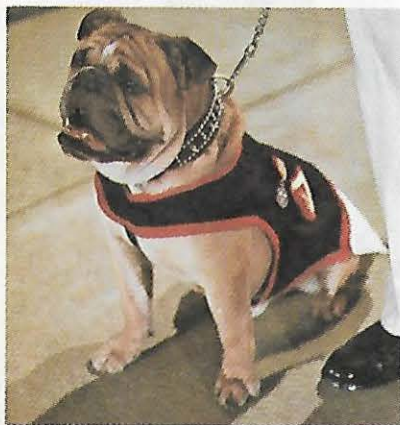
*Multi-medaled sergeant major, in sword salute, opens the Evening Parade*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRED J. MAROON





*Led by the Marine band, the entire battalion sweeps across the parade ground for the Pass in Review*



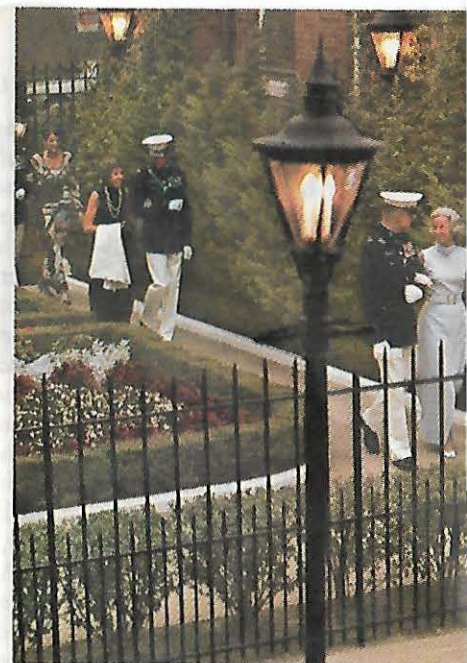
*Chesty Pagett, Corps mascot, sports his National Defense Medal*

"The President's Own," has played for every Chief Executive since Jefferson. It performs for visiting royalty and heads of state; its fanfares herald inaugurations and ship launchings; its muffled drums escort America's honored dead to their final resting place in Arlington Cemetery.

Following the concert, the drum-and-bugle corps moves into position at the south end of the field, while the band moves to the north end. The bell on the flagpole rings, and Corporal Chesty Pagett—the Ma-

rines' toothy mascot, an English bulldog—makes his entrance, strutting down the center walk. The members of the drum-and-bugle corps, in red tunics, are joined by the silent drill team and ceremonial companies, in blues. In all, 210 men, ranging in rank from private to major, appear on the parade ground. In addition to their other duties, they drill for this show three hours a day for six months.

The first show-stopper of the evening is the March on the Colors. The color guard, spotlighted, moves



*Officers escort guests along a garden walk to the Parade*

*A rifle toss, in perfect synchronization, during the show-stopping Mirror Drill*





to the center walk, the band playing "You're a Grand Old Flag." A soft night breeze ruffles the Stars and Stripes—and also the Marine Corps battle flag, with its silver bands, streamers, palms, oak-leaf clusters and stars representing the 412 awards that span the 198-year history of the corps from the American Revolution to Vietnam. The band and the drum-and-bugle corps counter-march from opposite ends of the field. The adjutant commands, "Present arms!" While the band plays "The Star-Spangled Banner," the honor guard lowers the flag. As the last note fades, the flag is unhooked and the halyards are secured.

Following a brief musical interlude, the silent drill team goes into action. Twenty-four men in dress blues perform an intricate drill in total silence except for the slap and click of their rifles. Not a word is spoken, not an order given. The split-second timing is breathtaking—especially since some of this is done with fixed bayonets.

Their show-stopper is the Mirror Drill. A sergeant walks down the line, stops in front of a man, and the two, facing each

other, perform exactly the same rifle drill—giving the illusion that one is a mirror image of the other. Ten-and-a-half-pound rifles spin through the air like pencils. At the end, the sergeant walks away, flings his rifle over his left shoulder without looking back—and the man in the line catches it without moving out of position.

The clincher of the evening is the Pass in Review. To the strains of "The Marine's Hymn," the entire 210-man battalion sweeps across the parade ground, saluting the commanding officer and guests of honor. As the band plays "The National Emblem March," the color guard marches forward, halts on the center walk, and retires the colors. To the lilt of "Anchors Aweigh," the field is emptied.

In the darkness, one lone bugler mounts the ram-parts atop the barracks. Outlined by spotlight against the blue-black sky, he plays "Taps," and the thin, silver shard of music cuts through the night air like a saber. The Evening Parade, aimed at neither hawk nor dove, but designed to express the pride and dignity of America, is over.



*"Taps"—and the day is officially over*



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