



Marine!: The Life of Chesty Puller

Burke Davis

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The gripping story of an extraordinary American hero, the most decorated man in US Marine Corps history, from a *New York Times*–bestselling author.

“We are flanked on both sides by an enemy that outnumbers us 29:1. They can’t get away from us now!”
—Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller, USMC

In the glorious chronicles of the US Marine Corps, no name is more revered than that of Lt. Gen. Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller. The only fighting man to receive the Navy Cross five separate times—a military honor second only to the Congressional Medal of Honor—he was the epitome of a professional warrior. A son of the South, descendant of Robert E. Lee, and cousin to George S. Patton, Puller began his enlisted career during World War I and moved up through the ranks as he proved his battlefield mettle in Haiti and Nicaragua, with the Horse Marines in Peking, in the Pacific Theater of World War II, and in the nightmarish winter engagements of the Korean War.

Fearless and seemingly indestructible, adored by the troops he championed yet forced into early retirement by a high command that resented his “lowly” beginnings and unwillingness to play politics, Puller remains one of most towering figures in American military history. Bestselling military biographer Burke Davis paints the definitive portrait of this extraordinary marine hero.

Marine!: The Life of Chesty Puller Details

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John Lomnicki, says

WOW

This is a easily read narrative that explains who Chesty Puller is. I was always curious who he was and what he did that was remarkable, now I know. I highly recommend this book.

George says

Semper Fi.

“...it is a matter of life or death for officers and noncommissioned officers to have respect from the men—and something more. Adulation. They must obey orders to the letter, without question, though they die for it. It is the only way to handle men in combat. If you lose control, you lose lives. It is so simple as that.”
(Kindle Locations 594-596)

Lewis Burwell “Chesty” Puller was a United States Marine Corps lieutenant general. An old-fashioned *man’s man*; one you could believe might have had the words: *valor, honor, courage, heroism*, indelibly etched into the fabric of his character.

An exemplary warrior, an exemplary leader, and a most exemplary Marine. He enlisted in the United States Marine Corps, as a private, in 1918; and was retired 37 years later, in 1955—the most decorated Marine in American history—as a three-star general.

Recommended to me by a friend who served in the USMC, Burke Davis’s biography: *Marine!: The Life of Chesty Puller* earns exemplary marks for comprehensive research, and for excellent narration of an incredible life.

Recommendation: Highly recommended for all who’d like a glimpse into the mindset of one truly courageous Marine.

“Then you could see on the faces of the troops what he meant to them. Every eye rolled after him as he walked on and their expressions said better than billboards that he was their kind of an officer. They would have followed him anywhere.” (Kindle Locations 3058-3060).

Open Road Media. Kindle Edition, 400 pages, 7,430 Kindle locations.

Will Johnson says

Its hard to imagine meeting someone like Chesty Puller. Patriotic, brave, and bold; its hard to find all of those qualities in people today. If you ever hear someone ask how America survived the first half of the twentieth century, recommend this book to them.

R. A. Swarting says

Very inspirational. Calling Gen Chesty Puller an American Hero does not adequately capture the selfless contribution this Marine has made to our country. I learned a lot about fearless "Chesty's" leadership throughout some of the most grueling engagements the Marine Corp tackled during pre-WWII, WWII, and Korea. I plan to purchase this book for my son, nearly commissioned USMC 2ndLT.

Patrick says

I have read this numerous times...it was often great airport reading when flying back and forth to the States from Okinawa or while waiting for the plane to show up on the way to or from a deployment. I also read it twice in college and once during my time at Infantry School at Camp Geiger. It's a great book for a new enlisted Marine or officer.

This book is an exciting account of Chesty Puller's adventures as the most decorated Marine in history, but the book itself is not great history or biography. Still every US Marine should read (many probably have), because this book does a superb job of letting us all know what the standards are for leadership, initiative, and intensity in combat while you serve in uniform. For those who want the real facts of Chesty's life, I recommend the recent biography by Jon T. Hoffman, which is superb. But if you want to know what Chesty Puller means to the Marine Corps, then you need to start with this book.

Charles Charlesworth says

What can you say about this artfully done biography of the most famous Marine to have walked the grinder? The author was masterful and the subject was beyond legend. At night in Marine Bootcamp after prayers we recited GOD Bless the Marines and then "GOD Bless Chesty Puller where ever you are".

Does that give you the scope of how that man was revered? General Lewis B.(Chesty)Puller is the most decorated Marine in History. His career spans from the Banana Wars before WWI to Korea and was rejected for additional service in Vietnam because of his advanced age. As much as he was revered by enlisted men and junior grade officers he was held in jealous contempt by headquarters Marine Corps. He was awarded 5 Navy Crosses more than any other man in history. Anyone of those 5 Crosses qualified for the Congressional Medal of Honor, but jealous administrative Command personnel made sure it never got any further than the Department of the Navy. They felt insecure even in his presence yetn thought because he wasn't an academy grad he wasn't worth of their click.

General Puller was General Patton's second cousin and both were direct decendants of Robert E. Lee. Both attended VMI.

Frank J Cruice says

Excellent read, a true American hero!

This was an outstanding account of a tremendous leader of American troops. His understanding and appreciation for the enlisted man, non-comm's and junior officers was the key to his success and that of our military. Our leaders today should heed his words and teachings.

Sharon says

Thank God there was only one Lewis Puller! Even the Marines couldn't have handled two of him! I had heard the name for quite some time but had no idea who he was...I certainly do now. His ability to lead men under fire was second to none, as well as his ability to 'be one of the guys'. It's said that his men would follow him to Hell, and I think now I know why. A fast read, so much information crammed into this small book, and the author makes no effort to be impartial. He's a fan, like so many others.....

Dick Reynolds says

Burke Davis' biography of Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller vividly portrays the military life of a man who was a professional in the best sense of that word. He studied the men and the tactics they employed in the U. S. Civil War before he enlisted in the Marines. As a sergeant he led patrols fighting guerrillas in Haiti and Nicaragua. Later, as an officer, he led Marines in China as CO of the 2nd Battalion, Fourth Marines. (I served in 2/4 and other parts of the Fourth Marines from 1959 to 1962 when it was located on Oahu.) He strongly believed that tough training and knowledge of the enemy were keys to success in battle. The book also details Chesty's leadership in the First Marines during the battle of Guadalcanal. The Army was so impressed with him that soldiers were added to Chesty's battalion so they could learn how to defeat the Japanese. Chesty believed that a leader should be out in front with his troops, setting the example, and inspiring them to accomplish the mission no matter how desperate the situation. He did this during the invasion of Peleliu and later in Korea during the Inchon landing, the capture of Seoul, and in the freezing terror of the Chosin Reservoir. He must have had a guardian angel watching over him during all this combat for he was wounded only once in his leg with shrapnel. Many legends sprung up about Chesty. When informed at the Chosin that they were surrounded by the enemy, he replied in a positive way; the Marines could now shoot in any direction and hit the enemy.

Chesty was a devoted family man and wrote daily to his wife, Virginia, who looked after their daughter, also named Virginia, and later their son, Lewis Jr. After the Korean War was over, Chesty commanded units on both U. S. coasts, the latter one at Camp Lejeune, NC. During this time he became ill and was required to have tests performed at the Naval Hospital in Bethesda, MD. He adamantly maintained that he was fit for duty but the medical authorities mandated his retirement. There is still an aura of some skulduggery about this; many in the military believed that Chesty was being punished for being "politically incorrect," always speaking his mind while ignoring the consequences.

Chesty retired as a Lieutenant General in October 1955 at age 57 and lived until 1971. In March 1980, the U. S. S. Lewis B. Puller (FFG-23) was launched and sponsored by Mrs. Puller. My youngest son, Chris, served on this ship in the early 1990s and I had the opportunity to spend time with him for a "Family Day" cruise from Long Beach Harbor out into the Pacific Ocean. In the wardroom there is a display of Chesty's fifty-three medals and ribbons including his five Navy Crosses and the Army's Distinguished Service Cross, testifying that he was the most decorated Marine in our country's history.

Phillip Wilkins says

One of the best books I have.

I bought this as a book to fill in time while waiting at a car dealership service area while my car was being serviced. I couldn't put it down. A really good read about a very great man. We could use someone like him today.

Joseph says

“Don't forget that you're First Marines! Not all the Communists in hell can overrun you!”

Chesty Puller to his Marines, when surrounded by the Chinese at Chosin Reservoir.

Marine!: The Life of Chesty Puller by Burke Davis is the biography of the Marine Corps most decorated man. Davis is the author of over thirty-five books, many of the dealing with the Civil War. He was known for his meticulous research.

Ask any Marine to name one person that personifies the Marine Corps and the most likely answer would be Chesty Puller. There are many stories told about Chesty Puller and remarkably they are all true. He stared down a grenade in WWII simply proclaiming to those around him it was a dud. He was a great leader and those who he pulled aside and corrected would later claim that Puller inspired them to be better Marines. He also knew the importance of the people under him. Whether a senior Non-Commissioned Officer or a private he was fair and knew they were key to his success. Once he saw a Second Lieutenant standing in front of a private who was repeated saluting him. He asked the Lieutenant what was going on. The lieutenant said the private did not salute him and to teach him a lesson he was making the private salute one hundred times. Puller said that was fair and that the lieutenant rates the salute, but he reminded the lieutenant that he is required to return ever salute the private gives. Puller watched as the lieutenant now returned each and every salute.

Puller believed in leadership by example. The senior men should always be last. Juniors were always first to the chow line, first to receive medical treatment and Puller was not shy in enforcing this to all those in his command. He was a rare officer that was respected and liked by all those who served under him. When the troops were sleeping in the mud, Puller was sleeping in the mud too. When the men marched, Puller marched with them rather than ride. Although serving under Puller was physically challenging, he believed that the harder his people trained the more effective they would be in combat and success in combat was the Marine Corps' goal.

Marine! follows Puller from his childhood to his retirement. Puller's entire military career is covered from his beginnings in Virginia Military Institute, through Parris Island and the end of WWI. What helped make Puller a successful leader was his early service in Central America. This experience was in a time when military valued staff positioning over combat. Puller gained a practical advantage for service in both World War II and Korea. He became the most decorated Marine in history and the only person to earn five Navy Crosses.

For the military historian or Marine wanting to learn leadership or history, *Marine!* is a very worthwhile read. Although Puller is known for his military actions, his personal life is also covered. I never thought Puller had time for a wife and children. Davis writes a well-rounded biography that does not disappoint anyone looking for a larger than life (true) story.

“Take me to the Brig. I want to see the “real Marines”.
– Major General Chesty Puller, USMC – while on a Battalion inspection.

Theresa says

Once a Marine always a Marine

This book is about nostalgia for anyone interested in Marine history. Chesty Puller is a legend even to this day for Marines. They don't make officers like this anymore.

Geoff Sebesta says

This is one of those books you read for truly no reason at all. I picked up a copy while hitching around Minneapolis back in May, and just finished it tonight. It was there, I read it.

I started the book in the hope that Chesty Puller would be as interesting as Smedley Butler. Too much to ask. Instead of a pioneering metageneral with a taste for social reform, I found a marine who was exceptionally good at killing things without dying. Mostly during WWII. Ho-hum.

Puller's legendary invulnerability is celebrated without being investigated, his participation in bluntly colonial warfare passed over without comment or insight. The story is a set of anecdotes about how strong he was, how tough he was, how he had malaria but went out and achieved anyway. The horrors of war are glancingly discussed, but this is a book from 1962 -- after Korea, before Vietnam, during the Kennedy administration but before the end. Its real concerns arise towards the end, but if you were to read any page at random the message would be Be Tough and Follow Orders.

But after persevering through the beginning years in Nicaragua and Haiti, through WWII and a lot of hullabaloo about Guadacanal, the book struck upon two things in my sphere of interest -- the conditions on the ground for the Korean War (specifically the cold weather and poor equipment, which this book explains in detail), and the Ribbon Creek incident (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ribbon_C...) which dragged Puller out of retirement to offer a spirited defense of the Marine's right to impose discipline.

There's also a fair amount of casual racism in this book.

In conclusion, I would not recommend this to anyone who was not specifically studying the campaigns Puller participated in, but he did participate in some important campaigns and it's fairly well written for what it is.

Timothy Boyd says

One of the best bios I have ever read. The story of an incredible Marine and military legend. Very recommended

Diane says

A wonderful biography about a great American Warrior! General Puller was a highly decorated Marine who fought in 4 Wars and was beloved by the Men he fought with and is revered to this day! Enjoyable reading for those interested in Military History!
