



A History of the Marine Military Expositions

Mid-morning on 18 August 1981, citizens of Tucson, Arizona, were surprised to hear the twin turbine engines of an aircraft circling very low and directly over the downtown area. At precisely 9 a.m., the aircraft touched down in the west parking lot of the Tucson Community Center, providing a dramatic grand opening for a military exposition called the “Modern Day Marine—Force in Readiness Exhibit.”

In 1981, the leadership of the Marine Corps League, a Congressionally chartered veterans’ organization, sought and received support from the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Robert H. Barrow, for the concept of the League’s development of a military exposition focusing on the defense industry’s response to the needs of the Marine Corps. The three-day event was to be held in Tucson in conjunction with the Marine Corps League’s national convention.

Though modest in size, by today’s standards, the 55-exhibit Tucson exposition was well received by attendees—mostly Marines from bases in Arizona and Southern California. Exhibitors were so pleased they encouraged future productions of the event. In 1982, and over the next several years, the event, bearing a new title—the Modern Day Marine Military Exposition—was held at a major hotel in downtown Washington.

In 1993, at the invitation of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, the exposition moved to the Marine Corps Air Facility at Marine Corps Base, Quantico, Virginia. With three of the Base Air Facility’s hangars housing indoor exhibits, and aircraft staging areas outside the hangars used for outdoor displays, there was space for comfortable expansion of an event that was growing significantly in exhibits and attendees with each passing year. Its production on the Base at Quantico permitted exhibitors to present their equipment and systems to the uniformed Marines and civilians from Marine Corps commands headquartered on the base, who are responsible for the Corps’ research, development, acquisition and procurement. In 2006, the exposition moved to Lejeune field, which provides an exceptional venue for this event.

Also of significance, the Marine Corps’ most important officer, staff, non-commissioned officer professional schools are on the Base. Therefore, the men and women who are users of the items presented at the exposition—and will become planners for the Corps’ future—are able to see the very latest in equipment and technology, and can discuss their needs, relate personal experiences and engage in dialog with manufacturers.

Since the event’s inception, Marine Corps’ support for the exposition has been superb in all respects. One recent example of that support was the decision for the Marine Systems Command to become a co-sponsor in 2007.

With the growth of the exposition came an invitation from the Marine Corps to the Marine Corps League, in the early 1990s, to produce user versions of the exposition at major Marine Corps bases in North Carolina and California. These events—Marine South and Marine West—provide an opportunity for Marines who are training to fight their country’s battles “in the air, on land and sea” to also see, first hand, the latest equipment and systems being designed for their operational use.

The success of the Marine Military Expositions reflect overwhelming support, not only of thousands of Marines but also by hundreds of companies from around the world, that have come to count on the exposition, year after year, to be one of their best means of face-to-face communication with some of their most important customers—the United States Marines.



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