

# Lou Diamond - "Mr. Leatherneck"

**BLUF:** Leland "Lou" Diamond is renowned within the United States Marine Corps as the classic example of the "Old Breed." He was a rough and tumbled Marine who served in the Marine Corps from 1917 to 1945. His colorful language and large build made him an intimidating force to fellow Marines. Serving in both World War I and World War II, Diamond rose to master gunnery sergeant. He is most famous for his skill as a mortarman during World War II, receiving a letter of commendation from General A.A. Vandegrift at Guadalcanal for driving off a Japanese cruiser with well-placed mortar rounds. At the end of his career, he served as an instructor at the MCRD Parris Island, South Carolina, and Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, North Carolina.

**LEADERSHIP TRAITS DISPLAYED:** Justice, Judgment, Dependability, Initiative, Decisiveness, Tact, Integrity, Endurance, Bearing, Unselfishness, Courage, Knowledge, Loyalty, and Enthusiasm.

**SETTING THE STAGE:** Leland Diamond was born in Bedford, Ohio, in 1890. His parents were Canadian, and his father served with the Northwest Mounted Police during the "Yukon Gold Rush" days. His parents immigrated to the United States in the 1880s. Diamond grew up in Ohio, working in a railroad yard as a switchman from his teens. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in Detroit, Michigan, on 25 July 1917, at the age of 27. As a corporal in 1918, Diamond shipped out from Philadelphia aboard the *USS Von Steuben*, headed for France. Diamond saw action as a member of the 6th Marine Regiment at Chateau Thierry, Belleau Wood, the Aisne-Marne, St. Mihiel, and the Meuse-Argonne. He was promoted to the rank of sergeant in 1918. Diamond was known as "Mr. Leatherneck" by his fellow Marines because of his devotion to the Marine Corps and everything it represented. After the armistice, he participated in the march to the Rhine with the Army of German Occupation. When the war officially ended, Diamond returned home and shocked his family and friends by accepting an honorable discharge from the Marine Corps.

Between 1919 and 1921, Diamond was back working in the railroad yards. He became restless in civilian life and re-enlisted in the Marine Corps on 23 September 1921. He quickly regained his sergeant's stripes serving with the 4th Marine Regiment in Shanghai, China. Protecting American interests during the Sino-Japanese conflict, Diamond did not find it "much of a war," returning to the U.S. in 1933. Diamond returned to Shanghai in 1934 with the 4th Marine Regiment before being transferred to the 2nd Marine Regiment in 1937. Being assigned to the Marine Supply Depot in Philadelphia, Diamond reached the gunnery sergeant rank in 1939. In Philadelphia, he redesigned the Marine Corps infantry pack, which the Marine Corps approved in 1941. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, Diamond was transferred to the 5th Marines and trained as a mortarman. He quickly mastered both the 60mm and 81mm mortars. On 7 August 1942, at age 52, Diamond shipped out with the 5th Marines to Guadalcanal.

**THE STORY:** Diamond was never known as a "spit and polish" Marine, but that was not a pre-requisite at Guadalcanal. His no-nonsense attitude got more from his mortar teams than any other NCOs. During his time at Guadalcanal, Diamond became a legendary figure. One story that circulated involved his dropping a mortar shell down the stack of a Japanese cruiser offshore. However, this story was never verified. Diamond and his team were credited with successfully driving a Japanese cruiser out to sea with several well-placed mortar rounds. For his efforts, he received an official commendation from General Alexander Vandegrift, Commander of the 1st Marine Division.

After two months on Guadalcanal, the grueling climate and physical disabilities necessitated Diamond's evacuation from the island. After spending time in a New Zealand hospital, Diamond wrangled new orders back to Guadalcanal to rejoin

the 1st Marines. Arriving on Guadalcanal, Diamond discovered that the 1st Marines had shipped out to Australia. Bumping rides on ships and planes without orders, he rejoined his old outfit. On 1 July 1943, Diamond was sent back to the U.S., becoming a drill instructor at the MCRD Parris Island, South Carolina. Many recruits credited Diamond with preparing them for the fierce combat they would experience in the Pacific through 1945 and later in Korea.

**AFTERMATH:** Diamond retired on 23 November 1945, though he requested re-enlistment into the Marine Corps in 1950 when the Korean War broke out. He died on 20 September 1951 at the Great Lakes, Illinois, Naval Training Center Hospital. In 1955, Diamond was the subject of a television series *Cavalcade of America* entitled "The Marine Who Lived 200 Years." The Filipino-American actor Lou Diamond Phillips was named after him by his father, a Marine Corps C-130 Crew Chief, who trained under Diamond at MCRD Parris Island. Diamond's most significant legacy is that he was "a one-of-a-kind Marine."

## QUESTIONS

1. Why is the story of Lou Diamond one that every Marine should learn?
2. Which elements of leadership did Lou Diamond most display?
3. How did Lou Diamond exemplify the Marine Corps ethos?

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