One day he stopped in the hallway to admire a painting of Lincoln. As he took a step forward, President Roosevelt was wheeled around the corner. “I came very close to falling across the president’s lap.”

Training on Bi-Wings to WWII in the Pacific.

U.S. involvement in World War II after Pearl Harbor created a strong demand for military pilots.

Ferguson was given orders to Chapel Hill to start flight training. He trained to be a pilot in N2S Stearmans (nicknamed “yellow perils”), aircraft with open-air cockpits and fabric-covered bi-wings that were started by students cranking heavy flywheels. He qualified to fly dive bombers, torpedo bombers, and fighters.

Ferguson was sent to Pearl Harbor to be part of the first wave of the planned invasion of Japan, during which 1,000,000 casualties were expected. Japan surrendered while his squadron was waiting for orders to go to Japan and was diverted to China. Ferguson served the remainder of his time in the Pacific Theater as a dive bomber pilot in China, where the Manchurian Army had not yet surrendered.

From San Diego’s MCRD to FDR’s White House

A case of “wanderlust” motivated Major Glenn Ferguson (USMC-retired), born in 1921 in Harvey, Illinois, to join the Marine Corps.

Boot Camp was at Marine Corps Recruit Depot here in San Diego in 1939. His company held maneuvers on the land between MCRD and La Jolla . . . an area he remembers as being devoid of human inhabitants.

The Higgins Boat had not yet been introduced, so his company practiced landings off the front of whaling boats. While engaged in those exercises, he observed planes flying over North Island. It re-ignited his dream to be a pilot.

During the early years of World War II, he was assigned to protect couriers carrying top secret documents and help set up security at Shangri Lai (the presidential retreat that President Eisenhower later renamed Camp David.)

Another assignment early in his career was serving as a receptionist in the White House. He interacted with many dignitaries including Admiral Leahy, Frances Perkins (Secretary of Labor) and Harry Hopkins (Advisor to FDR).

Ferguson claims that the single most memorable moment of his Marine Corps career occurred while serving in the White House.

VETERAN OF THE MONTH:  Major Glenn Ferguson (USMC-retired)

A 26-year veteran of the Marine Corps with combat tours in both World War II and Korea, Major Glenn Ferguson is January’s “Veteran of the Month.”

He learned to fly on aircraft with fabric-covered bi-wings, served as a dive bomber pilot in the Pacific Theater during WWII, flew a medical evacuation helicopter in Korea, and was a Marine One pilot for President Eisenhower. He volunteers with the Flying Leatherneck Aviation Museum and founded the Irene Ferguson Marine Marine Wife Recognition Award.

Veteran of the Month:  Major Glenn Ferguson (USMC-retired)
After the war, Ferguson served as a Marine Corps test pilot and flight instructor. He experienced several incidents of engine failure -- and crashes. In one of the more memorable incidents, his squadron was landing two abreast on two different El Toro runways. The wing of his Corsair caught a burble and hit a large pile of dirt left by a contractor on the side of the runway. It then hit a deep drainage ditch and flipped over. He needed to be cut out of his harness by the firetruck crew. Staff at sickbay cleared him to go back to work that day, and the fire engine that came to his rescue is now in the collection of the Flying Leatherneck Aviation Museum.

Medical Evacuation Helicopter Pilot in Korea
Ferguson was given orders to go to Pensacola to learn to fly helicopters. He recalls that early versions of HO3S helicopters had controls assisted by bungee cords. Pilots appreciated an aircraft with recently replaced bungee cords!

In 1952, he was ordered to Korea as a medical evacuation helicopter pilot. Wounded were carried outside on the skids, with metal hoods over their heads to protect them from the wind. Sandbags were used to balance load, and night navigation was done by starlight. While serving in Korea, he was commended for holding three prisoners at bay using only the turning blades of his helicopter. He finished his tour by completing 134 missions, 29 of which were night missions, and evacuated 132 wounded. Ferguson characterizes serving as a medical evacuation pilot as the most meaningful assignment of his Marine Corps career. “I had done bombing and strafing, but I liked saving lives more than taking them.”

Marine One with President Eisenhower
After time as an instrument instructor, Ferguson joined HMX squadron after it started to fly Marine One. He flew President Eisenhower on trips in the United States and on goodwill tours of South America and the Middle East.

His last tour of duty was as a flight instructor at El Toro. The commanding general of the wing was one of his students.

After retiring from the Marine Corps, Ferguson held positions at several local aerospace companies.

Teaching the Next Generation about the Price of Freedom

Upon full retirement, Ferguson became very active with the Flying Leatherneck Aviation Museum in San Diego. He frequently speaks to school groups, visits schools, and supports the museum’s education initiatives.

He launched the “Honor, Courage and Commitment” Essay Contest and provides support for the “Marines in Flight” Art Contest. He describes the goals of the museum’s programs as encouraging young people to learn their country’s history and “to recognize and reflect on the past and that people have fought and died for their way of life.”

The essays and notes from teachers indicate that the programs are generating the introspection and understanding among students that he had hoped for.

Close to his heart is the Irene Ferguson Marine Wife Recognition Award, launched in memory of his wife of 64 years. The Award honors the strength and sacrifices of Marine wives. (See page 11.)
My wife’s passing gave me pause to reflect on the nearly six and a half wonderful decades we shared together. In doing so, I realized that in all the museums I had visited, all the parks I had walked through, and all the buildings I had been in, none included a tribute honoring the life of commitment and sacrifice made by service wives in support of their husbands. Their men frequently left for distant lands where they usually lead busy lives; sometimes in exciting or dangerous times. Many were awarded medals and received accolades from their fellow servicemen. Their feats were often extolled in the newspapers and magazines. Unsung were the wives left behind. These steadfast women nurtured and educated their children, cared for them in times of sickness, and soothed their fears when daddy was gone. There are no medals or monuments to attest to their trials, tribulations, and victories.

The all-female committee that chooses the awardee is chaired by the 2016 awardee, Lauren Huff. Its members include Marine wives as well as the granddaughter of Irene Ferguson.

Major Ferguson met Irene when he served in the FDR White House. They were the proud parents of two sons and were married for 64 years before her passing.