

**The Last Full Measure – Lewis “Chesty” Puller,  
Most Decorated Marine**

**Lead:** For 400 years service men and women have fought to carve out and defend freedom and the civilization we know as America. This series on *A Moment in Time* is devoted to the memory of those warriors, whose devotion gave, in the words of Lincoln at Gettysburg, the last full measure.

**Intro.:** *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

**Content:** For Chesty Puller, the Marines were his life. In 37 years, through three wars, Caribbean interventions, and regular service, Puller earned a reputation as a gruff, demanding leader, who, nonetheless, held the best interests of his men close to his heart. He became the most decorated marine in Corps history, but it was at Guadalcanal and at the Chosin reservoir in North Korea that Puller attained iconic status.

Born in Tidewater Virginia, he attended Virginia Military Institute but dropped out in order to enlist in the Marines for the closing months of World War I. In summer 1919, he was assigned to

**train recruits at Parris Island, South Carolina after which he attended officer's training school. Shortly after receiving his commission, Puller was separated from the service because the Marine Corps was cutting back after the war. He re-enlisted as a corporal and served for five years in Haiti as an officer in the Gendarmerie d'Haiti, a joint U.S.-Haitian constabulary designed to enforce order in that troubled nation. In 1924 Puller was commissioned a Marine Second Lieutenant and began his long apprenticeship in the Corps during the time of peace.**

**During World War II, he had attained the rank of Lt. Colonel and commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment on the strategic southern Pacific island of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. One of the key battles of that six month long struggle was the desperate defense of Henderson Field on August 24-25, 1942. Almost alone Puller's 700 man battalion defended a 2500 yard sector which under normal disposition would have been covered by a regiment. Using techniques of camouflage and jungle fighting he had learned in Nicaragua and China between the wars, he steeled his overwhelmingly outnumbered men to resist the Japanese assault. His battalion held the approaches to the field and accepted only 70 casualties while killing 1400 of the enemy. The**

**retention of the re-supply capabilities of Henderson Field and its attending artillery positions was the key to the eventual complete American victory at Guadalcanal.**

**By Korea, Puller was a full colonel and led the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Regiment at the Inchon landing, through brutal street fighting in Seoul and then in a heroic blocking action at the village of Koto-ri near the Chosin Reservoir. This permitted other Marine units to fight their way to safety and earned him his first star. In January 1955, Lt. General Lewis Puller, the Marine of Marines, his chest weighed down with more medals than any in the history of the Corps, was forced into retirement after a mild stroke. He died in 1971, his funeral attended by the Commandant, 43 generals and 1500 marines, active and former duty.**

**Research by Michael Roman, at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

## Resources

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**Garraty, John A., and Mark C. Carnes, eds. *American National Biography*. Vol. 17. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.**

**"LIEUTENANT GENERAL LEWIS "CHESTY" B. PULLER, USMC (DECEASED)." *Who's Who in Marine Corps History*. United States Marine Corps. 5 Feb. 2009 <[history.usmc.mil](http://history.usmc.mil)>.**

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