

## Young Marines visit Camp Lejeune

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DAILY NEWS STAFF

The Music City Young Marines learn discipline, leadership skills and teamwork all year long. This week, they got to see how it works in the real Corps.

The group from Nashville spent the week at Camp Lejeune, touring the base, shooting simulated weapons, exploring helicopters, watching amphibious assault vehicles land and more. But many said the best part of the trip was staying in the barracks and eating at the chow hall.

"We stay with the Marines in the squad bay," said Christian London, 12. "It's really cool to see real Marines in real life. ... We heard things before, now we actually get to see them and learn things about them."

The Young Marines were able to play pool and just "hang out" with the real Marines, said 16-year-old Ellis Worstall.

"And we eat chow (about) every 30 minutes," he said.

"I always wondered what Marines do all the time. Now I know they eat all the time."

But neither boy is complaining. Both said they enjoyed eating aboard base, though the group consensus is that officer chow is definitely better.

When they weren't getting a taste - literally - of life on base, the Young Marines also learned some Marine Corps and Jacksonville history.

Friday, the group toured the Beirut Memorial and the Montford Point Museum.

Museum director Finney Greggs told the boys about another outstanding Young Marine - the grandson of Montford Point Marine Sgt. Maj. Edgar R. Huff.

"As you stand here right now, you don't know the thrill in my heart," he said. "When I'm an old man sitting on my porch rocking, reading my Bible ... I'll know the Marine Corps is in good hands ... that our country is in good hands."

The Young Marine program is not designed to feed into the military, but rather as a program to teach citizenship and leadership, said Anthony Westbrooks, the Music City Young Marines commanding officer.

The program teaches "pride in our country, pride in our flag," he said.

Many are not from military families, and only a few will go on to serve in the military, but they do love to be around Marines, Westbrooks said.

The Music City group does a trip every year on a rotating schedule - to Parris Island, Camp Lejeune and Quantico.

They always enjoy it, and many say "I can't wait till I come back for real," Westbrooks said.

Matthew Mercer, 12, said he plans to become a Marine Corps officer when he is old enough. His father was a gunnery sergeant, he said.

Mercer has been a Young Marine for just a year, he said, but enjoys the program because he has made a lot of new friends and learned "courage, commitment and honor."

Susan Stalder - wife of Lt. Gen. Keith Stalder, commanding general of II Marine Expeditionary Force - dropped in Friday to say hello to the visiting Young Marines.

"I hope you feel proud of yourselves, because I am proud of you," she told them.

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### THE DAILY NEWS/JOHN ALTHOUSE

A history lesson: Young Marines from Nashville who were visiting the Beirut Memorial received an overview of history and facts from Ron Bower, who is retired from the Army.