

# Renowned University of Georgia Coach Has Roots in the Marine Corps



CWO-4 RANDY GADDO, USMC (RET)

Vince Dooley displays two of his Marine Corps bulldogs amidst his collection of about 275 bulldog figurines he has acquired over the years. “I had my grandchildren count them,” he said.

By CWO-4 Randy Gaddo, USMC (Ret)

Vince Dooley is probably best known as the University of Georgia coach who compiled one of the most successful college football coaching records ever; what isn’t as widely known is that his coaching success has roots in the United States Marine Corps.

In fact, he got his first experience as a football coach in the Marine Corps. And, he attributes a significant portion of his coaching and leadership style and success to lessons learned during his two years as an active-duty Marine and eight years in the Marine Corps Reserve.

“I was commissioned a Marine Corps second lieutenant in the morning and graduated from college that afternoon,” said the Auburn University graduate, who earned a football scholarship to attend the university from 1950 to 1954, where he was an all-star football and basketball player and team captain.

As a member of the Naval Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (NROTC) program at Auburn, at the end of his sophomore year, he was given the choice between a Navy or Marine Corps commission—he decided on the Marine Corps.

“I liked the history of the Marine Corps and the emphasis on pride and leadership. I felt more at home, and sports tied in better [to] being a Marine,” he said during a recent interview at Georgia’s Kennesaw State College, where he was consulting as the school plans to start a football program. At a youthful and fit 80, he still keeps a hard-charging schedule, including daily workouts that might wear out an average 50-year-old.

The tie between the Corps and sports was strengthened for Dooley in July 2012 when he was inducted into the Marine Corps Sports Hall of Fame during a ceremony at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va. As part of the trip

to Quantico, he was a special guest for the Evening Parade at Marine Barracks Washington, D.C.

“That was a point of pride for me,” he said about his induction. “It gave me an opportunity to restimulate my love and interest in the Marine Corps.”

“There has always been a heralded place for sports in the Marine Corps,” stated the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James F. Amos, in the letter to Dooley announcing his selection to the Sports Hall of Fame. “Whether it was through the talents and exploits of renowned athletes like you, or the simple participation of countless young Marines in installation intramural programs, Marines have tested themselves in sports competition. I am proud that an athlete of your caliber is also a Marine,” wrote Gen Amos.

Coach Dooley was unaware that he was being considered for the distinction.

“I got a call out of the blue,” he said, impressed that other notables such as Lee Trevino (champion golfer) and Ted Williams (pro baseball player and manager) previously had been inducted.

He said the occasion enabled him to introduce his wife, Barbara, to what the Marine Corps is all about. They were married in 1960 after he had completed active duty and was winding down his Reserve time in the Corps. “She absolutely loved it. She was very moved by the parade,” he said of the experience in Washington.

Dooley first experienced Marine Corps life between his junior and senior years at Auburn when he went to six weeks of summer Officer Candidates School at Quantico as part of the NROTC requirements.

“That was an interesting experience,” he said, shaking his head and chuckling. “I remember that President [Dwight D.] Eisenhower was scheduled to review the troops there, and the word came down that he was supposed to be there one afternoon at 2 o’clock. So, as the word passed along the chain of com-

mand, by the time it got down to the last officer, we were out there about 11 o'clock in the morning. It was a very hot day and, fortunately, I was in pretty good shape, being an athlete, but there were a few of those college students that didn't quite make it."

Second Lieutenant Dooley was slated to leave immediately after college graduation for two years of active duty in the Corps, but he had an opportunity to play in the College All-Star Game in Chicago, "which was really big in those days," he said. "I applied for a deferment and was granted that request so I was able to play. I didn't have to report to Quantico for the 4th Basic School Course until September."

Even as he honed his Marine Corps skills at The Basic School, he continued nurturing his love of football. And while he awaited his next Marine Corps assignment, he played football at Quantico. At the time, the Marine Corps football program was quite robust and highly regarded nationally. The program started in 1919 at Quantico and was fueled by top-notch athletes and a winning record. The program eventually succumbed to other priorities and disappeared in the 1970s.

"We played the universities of Cincinnati and Detroit, and we played teams at other bases," Dooley recalled of his playing days. "Then General Pollock, a great general and an athletic proponent who was at Parris Island, wanted me to come there to play as a result of my football exploits," he said. General Edwin A. Pollock (1899-1982), a Navy Cross winner, was the commanding general of Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C., from 1954 to 1956.

"Unfortunately, I tore my knee up, again, playing at Quantico," Dooley recalled with a rueful grin, his sharp blue eyes reflecting the disappointment. He previously had injured his knee playing football in college, an injury that resulted in a knee operation. "I wasn't able to play, so I coached at Parris Island for a year—my first experience as a football coach," he said. "I enjoyed the experience, and it stimulated my interest in coaching."

He enjoyed it so much that when it came time to leave active duty, he chose to pursue coach-



COURTESY OF MARINE CORPS SPORTS HALL OF FAME

**LtGen Richard P. Mills, Deputy Commandant for Combat Development and Integration, inducted Vince Dooley into the Marine Corps Sports Hall of Fame, Class of 2012, at The Clubs at Quantico, July 27, 2012.**

ing. He could have used his business management degree and gone into banking back in his hometown of Mobile, Ala., or he could have been the coach at his old high school, Mobile's McGill Catholic High School.

"The other opportunity, which was a great opportunity, was to go back to Auburn where I'd played and become the assistant coach under head coach Ralph Jordan, who had been my coach in college," he said. "Had it not been for that good offer of going back as an assistant coach in college at a very young age, I would have stayed in the

Marine Corps, but that was an offer I just couldn't pass up." He was only 23 when he made that decision.

But he managed to get the best of both worlds. "The whole time I was at Auburn I stayed in the [Reserve] because I enjoyed it," said Dooley, who left the Reserve as a captain. "We had a satellite platoon of the 38th Rifle Company out of Montgomery. I conducted all the drills at Auburn, so we didn't have to go to Montgomery for four years. Then a new company commander took over and wanted us to come to Montgomery for weekend drills, so we did that for my last four years."

In his platoon there was one Marine he vividly remembers.

"One of the squad leaders in the platoon I had was a young man named Carl Mundy," he recalled. Gen Carl E. Mundy Jr. was 30th Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1991 until his retirement in 1995 after 38 years of service. He had enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve at 18 and was a student at Auburn going through the Platoon Leaders Class program when Coach Dooley led him in his platoon.



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**One of Vince Dooley's Marine Corps "daws" is an appropriate desk nameplate from his active-duty days.**

“He was as solid as they come, a good man with the right stuff,” Dooley recalled of Gen Mundy’s time in his platoon. “After he became Commandant, I read an article about him in which he said I was his first commanding officer, but at the time I didn’t remember his name,” he reflected. “I had to go back and research to finally pin it down. So I made contact with him, and he invited me to come up to the Marine Corps Ball in Washington. We went out to a morning ceremony at the Iwo Jima Memorial [Marine Corps War Memorial] and that evening went to the Ball. I sat at the table with him and the Secretary of the Navy—it was quite an experience.”

Dooley said he would have continued as a reservist, but when he accepted the position as head coach at the University of Georgia, at age 31 in 1964, he was at another fork in the road.

“There was no way I could take off one weekend a month to do the drills,” he declared. “I couldn’t say, ‘Sorry, guys, I can’t coach this weekend, I’m going to the Marine Corps.’ So I had to give up the Marine Corps [Reserve].”

He went on to be UGA’s head coach from 1964 to 1988 and athletic director from 1979 to 2004. In his 25 years as

coach, he compiled a 201-77-10 record—among only a handful of coaches to win more than 200 games. His teams won six Southeastern Conference titles and the 1980 National Championship, earning him recognition as college football’s Coach of the Year. He said he often drew on his Marine Corps experience in coaching, especially the principles of discipline, pride and leadership.

His home in Athens, Ga., is filled with the many awards and accolades he has received for coaching and other pursuits, including some from the Corps, but Coach Dooley noted that he has tried over the years to do things that keep him in close touch with Marines.

He tells of an experience with another Marine who was well on his way to legendary status

about the time Dooley was starting his Marine Corps experience in 1954—General Raymond G. Davis, who earned a Navy Cross in World War II, a Medal of Honor in Korea and was the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps when he retired in 1972.

In 2003, a retired Marine friend at Dooley’s church told him about retired Gen Davis, a Fitzgerald, Ga., native. Gen Davis lived in nearby Conyers, and the friend suggested that Gen Davis was

someone Dooley would want to meet and have lunch with.

“I said by all means; sometimes there are things in life you put off and later regret, but this was one thing I didn’t put off—and I was so happy I didn’t, because he died two weeks after we had lunch together,” Dooley said, his voice trailing off as he contemplated the memory of meeting the American hero. “We had a wonderful 2½ hours talking Marine, telling stories about fellow Marines we’d known, because, well, you know, that’s what Marines do.”

Living in Athens, Ga., Dooley is fairly close to the site of his first football coaching experience, MCRD Parris Island, and has been back on several occasions.

In 1966, the sports information director at UGA wanted to write an article about Dooley’s Marine Corps experiences. So Dooley and his son, Daniel, then 5 years old, went to Parris Island not only for photo ops, but to visit the man Dooley said inspired him in life and coaching, Gen Edwin A. Pollock.

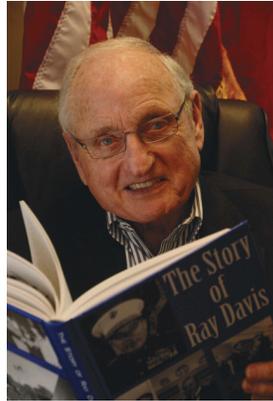
“I have long admired him and, looking back, recognize that his influence has been a help to me in my coaching career,” he said in the magazine article that resulted from his visit. “We flew back to Parris Island and met with General Pollock, who had retired there,” he said. “We had a great visit with him. He took us out to the new obstacle course and to some of the other things done at Parris Island since I’d been there.”

Years later, after he’d become athletic director at UGA in 1979, Dooley was speaking at an event near Parris Island and decided to take a sentimental journey back to the base to reminisce. “I was able to just get on the base and do sort of a melancholy trip all by myself,” he recalled. By then, the causeway entry road to Parris Island had been dedicated in honor and memory of Gen Pollock with a bronze bust and plaque.

But perhaps Dooley was drawn by the spirit of the Corps, because on that trip he made a discovery that bridged the gap between the Marine Corps and college sports.

“I went to the parade ground,” he remembered, reliving his days as the parade adjutant who had a key role in the weekly parades.

While he was at the parade deck reliving the memory, he said he saw something he’d never seen before.



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After his interview with *Leatherneck*, Vince Dooley peruses a signed copy of a book about Gen Raymond G. Davis.



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Vince Dooley proudly shows off his award and the CMC certificate he received upon his induction into the Marine Corps Sports Hall of Fame.



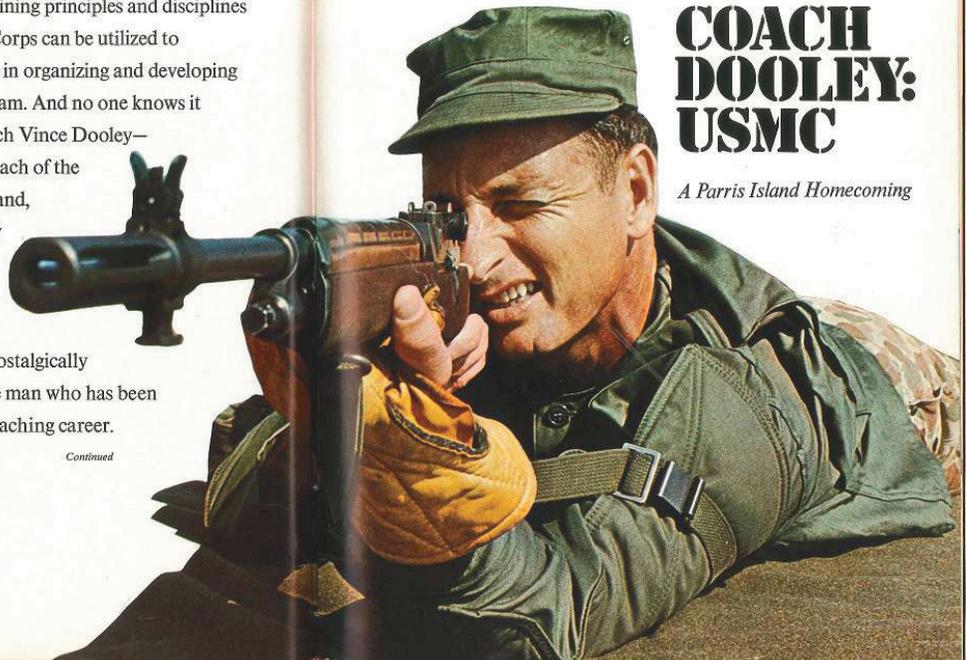
Many of the training principles and disciplines of the Marine Corps can be utilized to great advantage in organizing and developing a football program. And no one knows it

better than Bulldog Head Coach Vince Dooley—former Marine Captain and coach of the base football team at Parris Island, South Carolina. Coach Dooley returned for a visit to Parris Island this summer with his five-year-old son, Daniel. Here he relates that visit and nostalgically recalls his Marine days and the man who has been an inspiration in his life and coaching career.

*Continued*

## COACH DOOLEY: USMC

*A Parris Island Homecoming*



COURTESY OF VINCE DOOLEY

**Vince Dooley sights in an M14 rifle from the prone position during a visit to Parris Island in 1966; this photo and an accompanying article about Dooley's time in the Marine Corps appeared in a 1966 UGA in-house publication.**

“There were bronze statues of a male and female drill instructor and right next to them was a plaque with the Drill Instructor’s Creed,” he recalled. The leadership principles set forth in the creed impressed him so much that he decided it would translate well to his coaching staff at UGA. He believed that the relationship between a drill instructor and recruit was strikingly similar to that between a coach and student player. He wrote down the creed and used it as a basis, with adjustments, for a coach’s pledge.

The United States Marine Corps Drill Instructor Creed reads: “These recruits are entrusted to my care. I will train them to the best of my ability. I will develop them into smartly disciplined, physically fit, basically trained Marines, thoroughly indoctrinated in love of Corps and Country. I will demand of them, and demonstrate by my own example, the highest standards of personal conduct, morality and professional skill.”

Using this as his guide, he developed the “Georgia Coach’s Pledge,” which begins, “These student-athletes are entrusted to my care” and goes on to mirror the belief system embodied by Marine Corps drill instructors.

“It’s not that I forced it on them,” he emphasized with a wave of his hand and shrug of his shoulders. “It’s just that when you look at this pledge, you have to be for it; you just can’t be against it,” he proclaimed. “I adapted the DI Creed to become the Coach’s Pledge, which is still at UGA today; it sets forth the commitment of those coaches to their athletes as to how they would train them.”

With all the high-powered leadership training and experience he received in the Corps and at UGA, he still credits a nun in grammar school, Sister Patricia from Indiana, with giving him his first lesson in leadership. She also taught him to play basketball and make a jump shot.

He had led a group of boys over a locked gate that was blocking their way to a playing field and crashed the gate down in the process.

When Sister Patricia confronted him, “She was good,” he remembered. “I told her I liked the idea of being a leader, but she pointed out that there was a difference between positive and negative leadership, and I had been a negative leader that day. That made an impression on me then and has always stuck with me.”

This positive attitude parallels his belief that, when asked what the most important aspect of life and ethics, integrity and leadership is, he answers, “The Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. That has been said many different ways by many different people, but it transcends everything, and if we all lived by it, we’d have a better world.”

So perhaps it is not coincidental that Vince Dooley has spent much of his adult life affiliated with two organizations claiming English bulldogs as their official mascots.

The University of Georgia has Uga and the Marine Corps has Chesty. Both mascots represent tenacity and determination to win—also hallmarks of Dooley and his adopted alma maters—the University of Georgia and the United States Marine Corps.

*Editor’s note: The author, CWO-4 Randy Gaddo, USMC (Ret), was a combat correspondent as an enlisted Marine and later a public affairs officer. He retired from active duty in 1996 and now is a contributing editor for Leatherneck.*

