

## BGen Charles Lauchheimer and the Lauchheimer Trophy



On March 15, 2024, *Leatherneck Magazine* published an article by Col Dwight H. Sullivan titled “The Life of Lauchheimer: The Man Behind the Corps’ Top Shooting Trophy.” In the article, Col Sullivan discusses the remarkable career of BGen Charles Lauchheimer and how the trophy bearing his name came about. In what follows, we will survey the salient elements of this article.

Charles Lauchheimer was born in Baltimore, Maryland on September 22, 1859 to Meyer and Babeth Lauchheimer. He was the fifth of nine children. Lauchheimer graduated from a public secondary school, called Baltimore City College, in June of 1877. That year, Baltimore Congressman Thomas Swann held competitive examinations to select his nominee to the Naval Academy. The six candidates all had graduated from Baltimore City College, and Lauchheimer won the contest.

At the Naval Academy, Lauchheimer did well, graduating in 1881 in the top fourth of his class. The young midshipman was well liked and was something of a prankster. In his

second year at the Academy, Lauchheimer and several other midshipmen were confined to the yard at the school for disciplinary violations with the result that they could not go on liberty on a Saturday afternoon. Lauchheimer and his fellow inmates sewed bedsheets together to make a large banner on which they wrote: "Give us liberty or give us death." The midshipmen placed the banner in front of their barracks facing the quarters of the superintendent.

When Lauchheimer attended the Naval Academy, the program lasted six years, the last two of which were spent at sea. So the students completed their formal studies in four years, went to sea for two years, then returned to the Naval Academy for a final examination. Because of restrictions on the Navy at that time, there were only 23 commissions available for the 86 students taking the exam. Lauchheimer scored 14<sup>th</sup> in his class, and requested one of ten commissions available in the Marine Corps. With this commission, Lauchheimer and nine others became the first Naval Academy graduates to receive commissions in the Marine Corps.

Lauchheimer served for a time on naval vessels, and in March of 1892 he was assigned to the office of the Judge Advocate General of the Navy. In October of 1892, Lauchheimer enrolled in what today is George Washington Law School for a two-year course leading to the degree of Bachelor of Laws. Classes were held in the evening, so Lauchheimer could continue working in the JAG office in what today is the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. As a judge advocate, Lauchheimer excelled, receiving significant notoriety. Lauchheimer delivered popular lectures at the Naval War College, which lectures were published in *Proceedings*, a journal of the U.S. Naval Institute.

Beginning in 1899, Lauchheimer went through a rapid rise advancing from first lieutenant to colonel in six years. In February of 1899, Lauchheimer was promoted to captain. The next month, on March 3, the Senate approved Lauchheimer's nomination to be assistant adjutant and inspector of the Marine Corps at the rank of major. In that office, Lauchheimer served, among other duties, as Inspector of Target Practice of the Marine Corps. In 1901, Major Lauchheimer entered a Marine Corps team in an international rifle competition in Sea Girt, NJ. The Marines finished sixth out of eleven teams, and Lauchheimer was underway improving Marine Corps marksmanship.



*The Lauchheimer Trophy is displayed during the 2015 U.S. Marine Corps Matches on Stone Bay Rifle Range, Camp Lejeune, N.C., April 16, 2015.*

*The Lauchheimer Trophy is awarded to the competitor attaining the highest aggregate score in the individual rifle and pistol competitions. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Jacqueline R. Smith, MCI-East Combat Camera/Released)*

On March 23, 1903, Lauchheimer was promoted to lieutenant colonel and was required to transfer his duties as Inspector of Target Practice to a junior officer. Lauchheimer was sent to Manila to establish the office of Adjutant and Inspector of the Marine Corps in the Far East. He returned to Washington in December of 1904, was promoted to colonel, and became Adjutant and Inspector of the Marine Corps. However, Col Lauchheimer hit an obstacle in 1910 when he became involved in a number of disputes with the Commandant, Major General George Elliot. There was a court of inquiry concerning this situation, and Lauchheimer was transferred to Manila, while the Commandant served out the remainder of his term. However, Lauchheimer had loyal friends in the United States and in 1912, President Taft gave in to pressure and restored Lauchheimer as Adjutant and Inspector of the Marine Corps. The next year, the Army and Navy Club of Washington elected him as its president. A month later, Lauchheimer's friend and Naval Academy classmate, George Barnett, became the 12<sup>th</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Following the sinking of the RMS Lusitania in 1916, President Wilson sought to expand the Navy through the Naval Act of 1916. Importantly for Lauchheimer, the legislation created seven new brigadier general billets for the Marine Corps, one of which was the senior officer in the Adjutant and Inspector's department. The president nominated Lauchheimer, and the Senate quickly confirmed the nomination, making BGen Charles Lauchheimer the first Jewish general officer in the Marine

Corps. Lauchheimer performed an important service for the Marine Corps as it expanded in preparation for WWI. The Marine Corps declined to accept draftees, preferring instead to maximize the quality of recruits. The recruiting program that Lauchheimer oversaw received 239, 274 applications for 60, 189 openings.

In July 1919, during an inspection tour on the west coast, Lauchheimer suffered a stroke that left him in a coma. Another stroke on July 14, 1920, killed Lauchheimer at 59 years old. Lauchheimer's family sought to establish a shooting medal in his honor. The Commandant, Major General Barnett, endorsed the idea saying in part that Lauchheimer "was instrumental in establishing the present system of target practice in the Marine Corps which has placed the Corps, as you know, in the first ranks of shooters of the United States today." When John A. Lejeune succeeded Barnett as Commandant, he saw that the goal of a Marine Corps shooting medal in Lauchheimer's honor became reality. When Lauchheimer's family presented to the Commandant the trophy for winning "The Lauchheimer Trophy for Annual Competition in Small Arms Firing," Gen. Lejeune said: "...the distinguished services rendered by your brother, the late Brigadier-General Charles H. Lauchheimer, will forever enhance its value for every Marine."

The first competition was held in 1921, and since then, the original brass plaque has been remounted twice to accommodate the growing number of names of annual winners, and the trophy also honors "Charles H. Lauchheimer's role in developing Marines' marksmanship prowess."