

# CAROLINA MUSEUM OF THE MARINE

## Colonel Adele Hodges, USCM (Ret)

*A Trailblazer with Heart*



Colonel Adele E. Hodges, USMC (Ret), is among the distinguished Carolina Marines honored by the Carolina Museum of the Marine. Born May 25, 1954, in Laurinburg, North Carolina, Col Hodges has led a life of extraordinary service, defined by groundbreaking achievements, unwavering commitment to others, and heartfelt leadership.

After earning a B.A. in recreation and leisure from Southern Connecticut State University in 1977, she enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1978. Despite holding a college degree, she joined as an enlisted Marine with a humble goal: "to be the best Marine I could be for four years." That modest beginning launched a 33-year career marked by historic milestones (USMC, 2006). Commissioned as a second lieutenant in

1980, Hodges served in increasingly responsible positions, including deployments to Okinawa, Hawaii, and during Operation Desert Storm in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as a supply officer. In 2004, she was promoted to colonel and, two years later, became the **first woman and first African American** to command Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune (USMC, 2006).

Her leadership of Camp Lejeune from 2006 to 2008 was transformational. Known as "the hugging colonel," she balanced firmness with approachability, and her motto was clear: "Everybody needs a hug." She told *The Globe*, "I just want people to know how important I think they are and that everybody's job is important to me" (USMC, 2007). Yet, her warmth never compromised her strength. As one sergeant major put it, her friendliness should never be mistaken for softness.

During her tenure, she improved security measures, oversaw training infrastructure upgrades, and led quality-of-life initiatives for Marines, sailors, and their families. She also launched the "Hard Core Warrior" recognition program to honor veterans of WWII, Korea, and Vietnam and actively supported educators and healthcare workers serving military families. For her community leadership, she received the Commander's Award for Excellence from the Department of Defense Education Activity in 2007 (USMC, 2007).

After retiring in 2011, Col Hodges continued to serve. She joined the board of **Homes for the Brave** in Bridgeport, Connecticut, a nonprofit supporting homeless veterans, and became the **Connecticut State Commandant of the Marine Corps League**. Through initiatives like "Operation Noble Heart," "Back on Track," and veterans backpack drives, she continues to uplift fellow Marines and veterans. She even participated in a 22-kilometer hike to raise awareness about veteran suicide and speaks regularly at community and veterans events (CT Post, 2019).

Reflecting on her service, Hodges credited the Marine Corps with helping her overcome shyness and develop into a leader. "The Marine Corps thrust me into leadership... I stepped up and was able to take command" (CMOTM Bio, 2025).

Col Adele Hodges's legacy is one of barrier-breaking, people-centered leadership, and enduring service. Her story stands as an inspiration to all who believe in leading with both courage and compassion.

#### **Sources:**

- United States Marine Corps. "Col. Adele Hodges takes command of Camp Lejeune," *Marines.mil*, 2006.
- United States Marine Corps. "Commanding Officer is the Hugging Kind," *The Globe*, 2007.
- Connecticut Post. "Veterans walk 22 kilometers to raise awareness," 2019