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**General Martin E. Dempsey, U.S. Army
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
9999 Joint Staff Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20318-9999**

General Dempsey:

It was a pleasure meeting you and Mrs. Dempsey last month at Sine's on Pentagon Row. Meeting some of your staff members added to the evening.

Also, thank you very much for your Challenge Coin. As you may recall from our discussions, I am pleased to add it to my "collection" of such coins, examples of which are included in the attached "story" I wrote to commemorate our meeting.

I believe I mentioned that although I served my 22-year career in the Marine Corps, I have had close associations with several notable Army Officers you may know, including Army General John Wickham, my "boss" as President of the Armed Forces Communications & Electronics Assn. (AFCEA) for five years when I was his Director of Advertising for SIGNAL Magazine. I also had the privilege to sit in a box at Arlington National Cemetery, Veterans Day 2008, with then Army Chief of Staff General George W. Casey, Jr., at which time we talked about his predecessor, Gen. Wickham.

At National Defense Industrial Assn. (NDIA), I was Vice President and Associate Publisher of National DEFENSE magazine, working for another truly outstanding retired Army officer, LtGen Larry Skibbie. A fellow NDIA VP and friend (and Skibbie's former Army "Boss" when they were on active duty) was Army MGen Bill Eicher). Both are now deceased and buried at Arlington National Cemetery, not far from my wife Dorothy's grave. I do considerable military writing and wrote this tribute to Gen. Skibbie: <http://www.stagnesalumni.org/StoriesWeLostAWonderfulLeader.shtml>.

With the subject of Military Awards much in the media these days, especially for the Medal of Honor, perhaps you might appreciate this article on that subject that mentions General's McArthur, Marshall, Wainwright, Patton and others, written following my experience as Awards Officer for the Third Marine Division in Vietnam (1966-67), reporting directly to the only Marine General to die in Vietnam, MajGen Bruno Hochmuth: [Military Awards: Earned or Not, Was The Criteria Met? \(By Gerald F. Merna\)](#) and *this* about Gen. Hochmuth: [Gen. Hochmuth Story: By Gerald F. Merna, 1stLt USMC \(Ret.\)](#).

Perhaps our paths will cross again in the near future.

Semper Fidelis,

Gerald F. (Jerry) Merna

AMERICAN MILITARY LEADERS AND CHALLENGE COINS

(By Gerald F. Merna, 1stLt, USMC (Ret.))

Early on the evening of July 30th 2014 I was enjoying a glass of my preferred red wine at one of my favored Irish Pub's, 'Sine's of Pentagon Row.' Located in the Pentagon Mall Shopping Center on Pentagon Row, an outer area of shops, restaurants and bars immediately in front of my Condo building (The Representative in Arlington, VA). I can see the Irish Pennant of Sine's from my 10th-floor balcony.



The Representative Condominium, Arlington, VA



Sine's Irish Pub, Pentagon Row



Located so close to the Pentagon, this Pub is popular with many of the military men and women who stop off on their way home for a TGIF (Thank God It's Friday) celebration, a quick libation after a long or particularly stressful day, or a "get-together" with fellow military and other co-worker friends.

On this occasion, while seated at the rear of the Pub (as shown on the left in the above in-door picture), I became aware of a small group of people standing next to me discussing where they were going to sit while looking to meet others already there. A man dressed in a sport shirt and jeans with an obvious (to me) military haircut was on my immediate right and looked very familiar. I asked him, "Are you a *Marine*; you look like someone I knew at one time or another?" He graciously smiled and replied, "No, I'm an *Army Man*," and extended his hand introducing himself, saying, "I'm Martin Dempsey." I then asked, "Are you any relation to General Dempsey?" and was "stunned" when he replied, "I *am* General Dempsey."



Well, I had never met *the* General Dempsey but immediately pictured him in uniform having seen him on TV many times since he currently serves as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs' of Staff—the most senior and number one military officer in *all* of the services. I told him that's why he looked so familiar to me, and appreciated him being an *Army* man and not taking even humorous annoyance at my asking if he was a *Marine*. I introduced myself to him, and we spoke briefly for a few more minutes before he left and was seated with his group.

Sitting there surprised at this happenchance, I reengaged in my previous chat with the Bartender, who had just served some in the Dempsey group a beverage. I asked him if he knew he just served Gen. Dempsey. He didn't and like me, was very surprised to learn the General was there. About the same time, a lady came over to place an order with the bartender whom I recognized as being with Gen. Dempsey when they arrived, and she was then joined by him, who introduced me to her as his wife. When I inquired what the party occasion was she explained a dear military friend of theirs was being transferred, and they were having a little "going away" get-together for that family and then introduced me to the wife of the military man being transferred.

I had another brief chat with General Dempsey and somehow we got on the subject of my meeting several other three and four-star General officers from the Army, Marine Corps and Air Force, in the recent past. Asked who they were, I said the last "four-star" I met was at the Army's new Post Exchange at Fort Belvoir, VA, (it was larger than a "Super Target" store). Inside I was approached by a pleasant middle-aged Lady who, upon seeing my Marine Corps baseball cap asked if I was a Marine.¹ When I replied I was a "retired Marine," she asked if I would like to meet her Marine husband." I humorously replied "I always enjoy meeting fellow Marines in an Army PX," whereupon she led me over to where he was standing with another man and introduced me to him.



In the same way I recognized Gen. Dempsey as someone whose face was very familiar or possibly as a fellow Marine I once knew, when I was introduced to this man in a civilian suit I also said that *he* looked very familiar, that perhaps we had met somewhere before or may even have served together. He gave me his rank (General) and last name. I heard the *title*, "General," but I did not hear his name (I wear hearing aids and often "bluff," sometimes embarrassingly, rather than ask someone to repeat things again, when I don't hear parts of a conversation). The general then introduced me to the other man, saying he was the Chief of Staff of the Italian Air Force (I hope I heard *that* right!), who was their house guest that week. The three of us chatted amiably for a few minutes until I thought they had more important things to do than dialog with me and extended my hand saying it was nice meeting them and each of us shook hands. While shaking the hand of the General whose name I still did not know, he "palmed" me a 'Challenge Coin.'²

¹ Not everyone who wears a Marine cap is or was a Marine. I have personally met some doing so who were never even in any branch of service. It is also not unusual for a family member of a Marine to wear one.

²The use of "Challenge coins" within the modern-day military ranks is highly prevalent in many arenas. Members of the U.S. Armed Forces have a long-standing tradition of carrying such coins that symbolize unit identity and brotherhood. Each piece usually bears unique unit symbols or mottos that identify the group in which they represent, and are often traded, presented, and collected between unit members. They capture the very essence of military affiliation and instill pride to those that carry them.



Surprised finding this coin in my hand I took a quick look at it and (thankfully) saw the name “General John R. Allen, USMC.” But while I immediately recognized his *name*, I drew a complete blank at that moment as to his Marine *background*. I retired from the Corps in 1968 so there have been a few “changes” in military personnel, to put it mildly, and he was definitely not my service period of time.(Later, while mentioning the meeting to my daughter, she brought me up-to-date).

I told Gen. Dempsey that when I thanked Gen. Allen for his Coin, I mentioned it was one of several four-star and other General Officer coins I received in the past few years. This led to Gen. Allen asking, “Who else gave you one?”



I said one was from Marine General Peter Pace when he was the Assistant Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. My Brother Jim and I (who both served in Korea 1952-53) met him July 27, 2003 at the 50th Anniversary of the end of the Korean War ceremony at the Korean War Memorial.

Then I mentioned I also received a coin from Army General David Petraeus. Gen. Allen was very interested in wanting to know how I got *that* one. I explained that I am also a retired Vice President of the National Defense Industrial Association (NDIA), in addition to being the Associate Publisher of its Journal, National DEFENSE, and that each year NDIA gives a prominent American its prestigious “Eisenhower Award.” General Petraeus was the recipient of that award on May 8, 2009. ³ I was at that event and met him following the award and dinner. During our brief chat, when he learned I was also a retired Marine, as Gen. Allen did, he “palmed” me his challenge coin.

Unlike most other coins, Gen. Petraeus’ coin did not have his name and rank on it, but rather his then proud title as “Commander, U.S. Central Command.”

³ Gen. Petraeus was a highly decorated four-star General, serving over 37 years in the United States Army, including serving as the 10th Commander, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) from October 13, 2008, to June 30, 2010, for which he was awarded the Defense Distinguished Service Medal.



I also said I received a challenge coin from LtGen William M. Faulkner, Deputy Commandant for Installations and Logistics, though I could not recall where I met him. (It may have been at one of the many Marine Corps Awards Dinners I attend at the Crystal Gateway Marriott in Crystal City where various Marine Generals, including the Marine Commandant, are guest speakers and/or presenters).

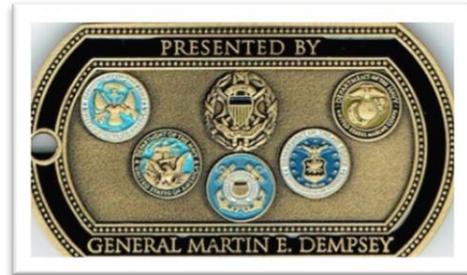


(Anther general officer Coin I received locally that I did not mention to Gen. Dempsey was from LtGen Ronnie D. Hawkins, Jr., U. S. Air Force, Director of the Defense Information and Systems Agency (Fort Meade, MD). I met him and his wife at a local Olive Garden restaurant where we were all dining and chatted briefly. Upon saying our goodbyes, Gen. Hawkins gave me (not palming) his coin (shown below).



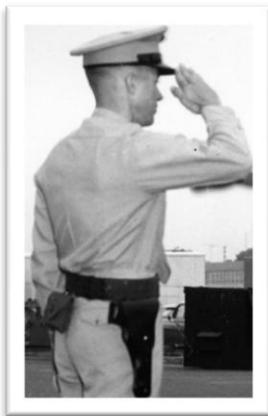
Following this recital of my meeting various General officers and receiving their challenge coins, Gen. Dempsey left briefly to return to his group. He returned shortly and gently placed in front of me *his* challenge coin! Very stunned—we had said our goodbyes—I reacted by saying words to the effect, "I hope you are not doing this because I mentioned receiving the previous coins!" (In fact, I felt a bit embarrassed that he might even have

thought so). But his immediate reply made me feel much better when he said, "Not at all; I just thought you might like to have one from me as well," adding, "I didn't have one on me when we were talking, and an Aide with me did have some."

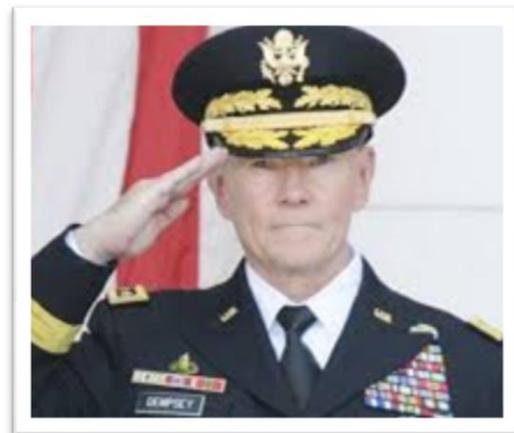


During the next hour or so, several other military men in his party would stop by to say hello. Each mentioned that Gen. Dempsey *suggested* they might want to meet me. These included Jim McGowan III, another Marine, who was also a lawyer, and Ewell (Chip) Sturgis, an Air Force Major, and others whose names I do not recall.

That was the last I saw of Gen. Dempsey as he left the Sine's, pausing to *be in* a picture taken by friends at the door. My surprising and totally unexpected meeting with Gen. and Mrs. Dempsey, and their friends, "made my day." Thank you, Sir, for your time and courtesies. **General, *this Marine salutes you!***



**1Lt Jerry Merna, U.S. Marine Corps,
Casualty Notification Officer, 1968**



**General Martin E. Dempsey, U.S. Army,
Chairman, Joint Chiefs' of Staff, 2014**



**MUSTANG: MASTER GUNNERY SERGEANT TO FIRST LIEUTENANT
(1947-1968, Korea and Vietnam)
08/04/14**