

## Brave to the Corps

*"Ill boy sworn in as honorary Marine"*

Article by Steve Moore - [The Press Enterprise](#)



The littlest leatherneck did it all Friday.

"Thirteen-year-old Joel Kondrot rode in a tank, plotted in the war room, fired an M-16 and ate chow in the mess hall.

"And as the seriously ill boy became an honorary U. S. Marine, he taught battle-hardy soldiers about courage.

"Joel suffers from a rare condition marked by fast-growing, recurring tumors in his throat, jaw and tongue. Surgeons removed one side of the boy's jaw in a 22 hour operation when he was 6. They rebuild his face using a rib and an abdominal muscle. Now a tube down his throat helps him breathe, and chemotherapy fight the tumors.

"But at the sprawling Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, troops rallied around the Murrieta youngster.

"As an American flag fluttered overhead and dozens of Marines stood at attention, Joel took the leatherneck's oath. He wore a specially made uniform complete with combat boots and cover.

"Joel had loved to play soldier and always dreamed of following in the footsteps of his father, Vincent, and becoming a Marine, said his mother, Linda.

"I'm just so touched, she said."

"After the ceremony, Brig. Gen. C. L. Stanley remarked, 'he's already been through combat that a lot of folks haven't, he represents the best of the Marine Corps; courage, honor and commitment.'

"A proclamation declared, 'Joel J. Kondrot 249895627 has been accepted for enlistment into the United States Marine Corps. Your enlistment reflects uncommon devotion and loyalty to a country and to the Corps.'

"The order was approved by Gen. C. C. Krulak, commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps. Only a dozen other people have received the honor since 1992. A couple of other applications were turned down this week.

"An Inland Empire group similar to the Make a Wish Foundation lobbied the Corps on the boy's behalf, **The Debbie Chisholm Memorial Foundation** . . . grants wishes to youngsters with terminal or catastrophic illnesses. The nonprofit group has granted about 120 wishes in five years, ranging from shopping sprees to amusement park visits to having a boy sworn in as an honorary deputy sheriff.

"In an eye-popping day, Joel arrived at the main gate by limousine at 7:30 a.m.

"Then Joel opened the hatch on the M1A1 battle tank and climbed inside. As the tank clanked toward open desert for some maneuvers, the boy raised and lowered the long gun barrel protruding from the turret.

"Later, still wearing his special combat helmet, vast and Marine emblem featuring an eagle, a globe and an anchor, Joel hopped aboard a 28,000-pound light armored vehicle for more runs. He spent time in a war room and fired a M-16 in a simulator-- but without live rounds.

"Joel wrapped up his day by waving in a few vehicles at the main gate. Four of his brother and sisters shared the day.

"It was fun, he said."