



Paul J. Fontana, Major General, USMC
"Paul"

Major General Paul J. Fontana, a Marine aviator, retired from the Marine Corps on July 1, 1973, after completing over 39 years of accumulated service. As a major during World War II, General Fontana was awarded the Navy Cross for extraordinary heroism as a pilot of Marine Aircraft Group 14 in the Solomon Islands area, November 11-14, 1942. His citation reads in part: "When twenty-two Japanese bombers with an escort of six Zero-type fighters attempted to bomb Henderson Field, Guadalcanal, Major Fontana, leading a flight of eight planes, shot down one bomber while intercepting and disorganizing the hostile formation before effective completion of its mission was accomplished. On the following day he sent down in flames two aircraft while his men destroyed five others of a large formation of enemy bombers about to attack friendly ships off Lunga Point. Later when a force of our bombers on an important offensive mission was intercepted by twelve fighters, Major Fontana, leading a six-plane flight, courageously engaged the attackers and sent two hostile aircraft hurtling into the water, thereby contributing to the disruption of the enemy attack..."



Paul John Fontana was born in Lucca, Italy, November 27, 1911. He grew up in Sparks, Nevada, and on completing high school there entered the University of Nevada at Reno. He graduated from the University in 1934 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering. A member of the Reserve Officer Training Corps unit at the University, he resigned his Army Reserve commission to accept appointment as a Marine second lieutenant, July 6, 1936.

After Basic School at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, a sea duty assignment aboard the USS *Salt Lake City*, and duty at Marine Barracks, Mare Island, CA., Lieutenant Fontana was ordered to Pensacola, Florida, for flight training in January 1939. He was promoted to first lieutenant, July 6, 1936.

Lieutenant Fontana was designated a Naval aviator on January 25, 1940. In March 1940, he was assigned to the Naval Air Station, San Diego, CA. He returned to Pensacola in November 1940 and served as a flight instructor until July 1941, when he joined Marine Fighting Squadron III, MAG 11, at Quantico, VA. He also completed the aviation course at the Army Chemical Warfare School, Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland. He was promoted to captain in October 1941.

When the United States entered World War II, Captain Fontana was ordered to aviation duty in San Diego. In March 1942, he joined VMF-112, becoming Commanding Officer in May 1942. He was promoted to major in August 1942.

In October 1942, Major Fontana embarked with his squadron for the Pacific area. As CO, VMF-112, MAG-14, he took part in combat against the Japanese in the capture and defense of Guadalcanal. Downing five enemy aircraft in four days over Guadalcanal in November 1942, he was awarded the Navy Cross and designated a Marine Corps ace. Remaining with the 1st MAW, he was named assistant Operations Officer of the Strike Command, Solomon Islands, in April 1943. After taking part in the consolidation of the Southern Solomons, he returned to the United States in October 1943. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel in December 1943.

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Lieutenant Colonel Fontana was then assigned to Marine Fleet Air, West Coast, in San Diego, as Assistant Operations Officer, having served briefly as commander of the Flight Training Unit, MCAS El Toro, CA. In December 1944, he was ordered to Hawaii for duty with the 2d MAW as Assistant Operations Officer. He also served in this capacity with the X Army Tactical Air Force for the Okinawa campaign, and was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V" for heroic actions against the Japanese, prior to and during the amphibious assault of Okinawa, from January 9 to June 30, 1945. The Distinguished Flying Cross was awarded him for heroism as a fighter plane pilot in the Ryukyu Island area from May to July 1945. He remained on Okinawa until January 1946.

Following World War II, Lieutenant Colonel Fontana served in Washington, D.C. as Assistant Plans Operations, and Training Officer, Division of Aviation, Headquarters Marine Corps from March 1946 to July 1948. The following month he entered the Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Maxwell Field, Alabama. After graduation in the summer of 1949, he returned to the MCAS El Toro, in July as Commander of VMF-311, MAG 12, 1st MAW.

At the outbreak of the Korean Conflict, Lieutenant Colonel Fontana was serving as Deputy Commander of MAG-12, 1st MAW, Fleet Marine Force, having assumed this assignment in May 1950. For conspicuous gallantry in action, September 21, 1950, while serving briefly as Deputy Group Commander, MAG-33, executing close air support of the Army's X Corps during an attack on enemy installations at Yong Dong Po, Korea, he was awarded the Silver Medal (Army). Rejoining his group on its arrival in the Wonsan area, he earned the Legion of Merit with Combat "V" for exceptionally meritorious conduct from October 10 to November 8, 1950, prior to and during operations at Wonsan.

In January 1951, Lieutenant Colonel Fontana was named CO, MAG 33, 1st MAW, and in this capacity continued combat operations against Communist forces. He was promoted to colonel in March 1951, and the following month returned to the U.S.

Colonel Fontana reported to MCAS El Toro in April 1951, and in May became Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, Aircraft, FMFPAC. He served there until July 1952. The following month, he entered the National War College, Washington, D.C. After graduation in June 1953, he served at Headquarters Marine Corps as Head, Operations and Training Branch, Division of Aviation. While serving in this capacity he completed helicopter training at Pensacola in the summer of 1954.

In June 1955, following his detachment from Headquarters Marine Corps, Colonel Fontana took command of the Overhaul and Repair Facility, MCAS Cherry Point, NC. He served in this capacity two years. In August 1957, he assumed command of MAG-13, 1st Marine Brigade, MCAS Kanoeha Bay, HI., and in addition, was assigned with his group to the 1st MAW in Japan from October 1958 through

February 1959. Following this assignment he became Chief of Staff of the 1st Marine Brigade in June 1959. While serving in Hawaii, he was promoted to brigadier general in July 1960.

In August 1960, General Fontana began a two-year tour of duty at the Pentagon as Deputy Director for Operations, J-3 Directorate, Joint Staff, Office of the JCS. Following this assignment, he became Commander, MAB, Eastern Area and CG, MCAS Cherry Point, in September 1962. He served in this capacity until August 1963, when he assumed command of 2d MAW at Cherry Point.



In June 1964, General Fontana was promoted to major general and assumed command of the 1st MAW in Japan. During this assignment, elements of the 1st Wing under his command engaged in combat operations in Vietnam. Upon his detachment in June 1965, he was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of a second Legion of Merit with Combat "V" for exceptionally meritorious service in "maintaining a skilled and highly motivated combat force" in Vietnam.

Upon his return to the U.S., he served as Director, Education Center, Marine Corps Development and Education Command, Quantico, VA., from July 7, 1965 until June 15, 1968, earning a Gold Star in lieu of a third Legion of Merit. Following this assignment, General Fontana was assigned duty as Deputy Commander, FMFPAC. A Gold Star in lieu of a fourth Legion of Merit was awarded him for service in this capacity from July 1968 until March 1970. Upon his return to the U.S., he became Commander MAB, Eastern Area/CG, MCAS Cherry Point, NC., until his retirement in July 1971.

General Fontana died on February 26, 1997, and was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery. He is survived by his wife, the former Beth Gillette of Evanston, IL., and four children; Susan Isaacs, Ann Landon, Mary Palmer and Paul, Jr.