



**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**  
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MARINE CORPS BULLETIN 1020

From: Commandant of the Marine Corps  
To: Distribution List

Subj: MARINE CORPS TATTOO POLICY

Ref: (a) MCO 1020.34H  
(b) 5 U.S.C. 552a  
(c) SECNAVINST 5211.5F  
(d) SECNAV M-5210.1  
(e) UCMJ Article 92  
(f) MCO 1900.16 W/CH 2  
(g) MCO 5210.11F  
(h) UCMJ, Article 92

Encl: (1) Updated Tattoo Policy Diagram

1. Situation. Marines have inherited a legacy that we must honor and preserve for future generations of men and women bearing the title United States Marine, and that means meeting and exceeding the standards the American people have come to expect from our Corps. The American people expect Marines to be disciplined, physically fit, and ready to accomplish any mission. They also expect Marines to represent the nation they are sworn to protect. The tattoo policy over the years has attempted to balance the individual desires of Marines with the need to maintain the disciplined appearance expected of our profession. This Bulletin ensures that the Marine Corps maintains its ties to the society it represents and removes all barriers to entry for those members of society wishing to join its ranks.

2. Cancellation. This Bulletin cancels MCBUL 1020 dated 2 Jun 2016. This Bulletin is cancelled one year from the date of publication or when incorporated into reference (a), whichever occurs first.

3. Mission. Commanders shall ensure that all Marines with tattoos adhere to the policy outlined in this Bulletin in order to maintain the disciplined appearance expected of our profession while removing barriers to service.

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

4. Execution

a. Commander's Intent and Concept of Operations

(1) Commander's Intent. Marines may have tattoos on any area of the body, excluding the head, neck, and hands in accordance with this Bulletin. Marines are advised there are future career implications regarding the application of tattoos. A tattoo that is not specifically prohibited may still prevent future duty assignments.

(2) Concept of Operations. All tattoos must comply with this Bulletin as described below.

(a) Content of Tattoos. Tattoos that are prejudicial to good order and discipline, or that are of a nature to bring discredit upon the naval service, are prohibited. Examples include, but are not limited to, tattoos that are drug-related, gang-related, extremist, obscene or indecent, sexist, or racist, as further defined below:

1. Extremist. Extremist tattoos are those affiliated with, depicting, or symbolizing extremist philosophies, organizations, or activities. Extremist philosophies, organizations, and activities are those which advocate racial, gender, or ethnic hatred or intolerance; advocate, create, or engage in unlawful discrimination based on race, color, gender, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity; advocate violence or other unlawful means of depriving individual rights under the U.S. Constitution and federal or state law; advocate, engage in, or support terrorism; advocate, engage in, or support the forceful, violent, unconstitutional, or otherwise unlawful overthrow of the government of the United States, any state, commonwealth, district, or territory of the United States; or advocates, engages in, or encourages military personnel or DoD or US Coast Guard civilian employees to violate laws or disobey lawful orders or regulation for the purpose of disrupting military activities.

2. Obscene or Indecent. Obscene or indecent tattoos are those reflecting a form of immorality relating to sexual impurity which is grossly vulgar, obscene, and repugnant to common propriety, or whose appearance tend to excite sexual desire or deprave morals with respect to sexual relations.

3. Sexist. Sexist tattoos are those that that degrade or demeans a person based on gender.

4. Racist. Racist tattoos are those that that degrade or demean a person based on race, ethnicity, or national origin.

(b) Head or Neck Tattoos

1. Tattoos on the head or neck, including in or around the mouth area, are prohibited.

2. The head is defined as the portion of the body above the first cervical vertebrae (C1).

3. The neck is defined as the portion of the body above the collarbone in the front area, above the seventh cervical vertebrae (C7) in the back area.

(c) Chest or Back Tattoos

1. Tattoos on the chest or back must be below the collarbone and seventh cervical vertebrae (C7). Tattoos on the chest or back must be covered by wearing a properly fitting crew-neck t-shirt with no portion of the tattoo showing.

2. The crew-neck t-shirt is required to be worn if a tattoo is visible in the "V" area created by the open collar of the short sleeve khaki shirt or utility coat (below the collarbone).

(d) Lower Arm Tattoos. Lower arm tattoos may extend down no further than a line around the circumference of the wrist measured at the wrist bone. (The prominent head of the ulna as it meets the wrist below the little finger.)

(e) Hand, Finger, and Wrist Tattoos. Tattoos on the hands and fingers are prohibited, with the exception of a single band tattoo of no more than 3/8 of an inch in width on one finger of each hand. The hand includes the area from the wrist bone to the end of the fingertip.

(f) Ultra-Violet (UV) Tattoos. Any tattoo only visible or apparent with the use of ultra-violet light must still adhere to the guidance in this Bulletin.

(g) Brands. Brands and other body art are subject to the same requirements, limitations, and prohibitions applicable to tattoos.

(h) Exceptions to Policy (ETP). Marines or applicants with tattoos or brands outside of the authorized areas delineated within this Bulletin may request an exception to policy to the appropriate adjudicating authority, with the understanding that ETPs are not likely to be approved.

b. Subordinate Element Missions

(1) Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (DC M&RA). DC M&RA is responsible for maintaining the Marine Corps official tattoo policy and is the final adjudicating authority for all tattoo issues.

(2) Director, Manpower Management Division (Dir MM)

(a) Dir MM is the adjudicating authority for all Active Component (AC) post-accession (i.e., upon completion of recruit training/officer candidate school) tattoo issues. These include but are not limited to retention, special duty assignments, return to active duty, tattoo content, etc.

(b) Dir MM is also responsible for adjudicating tattoo issues for officer retention boards.

(3) Director, Reserve Affairs (Dir RA). Dir RA serves the same role as Dir MM for Reserve Component (RC) post-accession adjudication.

(4) Commanding General, Marine Corps Recruiting Command (CG MCRC). CG MCRC is the adjudicating authority for any tattoo issue involving accessions (both officer and enlisted), to include enlisted Marines who apply for a commissioning or warrant officer program and prior service accessions.

(5) Marine Corps Uniform Policy Board (MCUPB). The MCUPB will incorporate all policy direction set forth in this Order into the next update of reference (a).

(6) Commanders. All commanders will ensure:

(a) Immediate compliance with the tattoo standards set forth in this Bulletin.

(b) That this Bulletin is appropriately disseminated and that all Marines within their command are properly briefed on its contents as soon as practicable and routinely thereafter.

1. Enlisted Marines will be reviewed for tattoos each time they submit a retention package to the Commanding Officer. Any tattoos not in compliance with this Bulletin will be reviewed against the Marine's OMPF to ensure a NAVMC 118(11) has been completed to document the tattoo(s), and may result in punitive or administrative action. Retention interviews will also be used as a periodic, informal counseling and instruction period to reinforce the regulations relating to tattoos.

2. For both officer and enlisted Marines, commanders shall also monitor compliance by reviewing tattoos

during semi-annual height/weight verifications. This requirement is part of the Commanding General's Inspection Program (CGIP) checklist.

5. Administration and Logistics

a. This Bulletin supersedes all previous Marine Corps tattoo policy guidance published in reference (a) or published via MARADMIN.

b. Officer and Enlisted Marines may continue to be assigned or allowed to serve on Special Duty Assignment (SDA), although assignment to ceremonial and other high visibility units may be restricted.

c. Questionable Tattoos

(1) Marines with a questionable tattoo must request official determinations of compliance to DC M&RA (MM/RA) via the chain of command using NAVMC 10274, "Administrative Action (5216)," endorsed to at least the battalion/squadron-level.

(2) At a minimum, the package must include a photograph of the questionable tattoo or description if in a private area, a copy of any existing documentation relating to the tattoo, measurement of the size in inches, description and location of the tattoo, and an explanation as to why the tattoo was deemed questionable by the commander.

(3) If the official determination reveals non-compliance, the commander will ensure the results are annotated in the Marine's record NAVMC 118(11) using the documentation parameters in this Bulletin.

(4) Commanders will determine any additional appropriate administrative or disciplinary actions when Marines obtain tattoos that are not in compliance with this Bulletin.

d. Forms Management. Navy Forms Online (NFOL) is the official online resource for Marine Corps forms located at <https://www.marines.mil/News/Publications/ELECTRONIC-LIBRARY/Page/2/>

e. Privacy Act. Any misuse or unauthorized disclosure of personally identifiable information (PII) may result in both civil and criminal penalties. The Department of Navy (DON) recognizes that the privacy of an individual is a personal and fundamental right that shall be respected and protected. The DON's need to collect, use, maintain, or disseminate PII about individuals for purposes of discharging its statutory responsibilities will be balanced against the individuals' right to be protected against unwarranted invasion of privacy. All collection, use, maintenance,

or dissemination of PII will be in accordance with the Privacy of 1974, as amended (reference (b) and implemented per reference (c)).

f. Records Management. Records created as a result of this Bulletin shall be managed according to National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) approved dispositions per reference (d) to ensure proper maintenance, use, accessibility and preservation, regardless of format or medium. Records disposition schedules are located on the Department of the Navy/Assistant for Administration (DON/AA), Directives and Records Management Division (DRMD) portal. Refer to reference (g) for Marine Corps Records Management policy and procedures.

6. Command and Signal

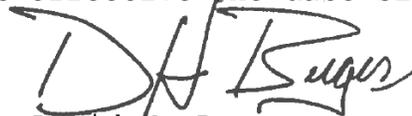
a. Command

(1) Paragraphs 3 and 4a of this Bulletin are punitive. Violation of the specific prohibitions and requirements in these paragraphs by Marine Corps or Marine Corps Reserve personnel is punishable under Article 92 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) (reference (h)).

(2) This Bulletin is applicable to the Marine Corps Total Force.

(3) Navy personnel must be in compliance with this Bulletin in order to wear the Marine Corps Uniform.

b. Signal. This Bulletin is effective the date signed.



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Enclosure 1: Updated Tattoo Policy Diagram

# UPDATED TATTOO POLICY

