

Marines

“At no period of the naval history of the world, is it probable that marines were more important than during the war of the Revolution.” (Cooper)

On November 10, 1775, the Second Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia passed a resolution stating that “two Battalions of Marines be raised” for service as landing forces with the fleet. This resolution, written by John Admas, established the Continental Marines and marked the birth date of the United States Marine Corps.

Resolved, That two Battalions of marines be raised, consisting of one Colonel, two Lieutenant Colonels, two Majors, and other officers as usual in other regiments; and that they consist of an equal number of privates with other battalions;

that particular care be taken, that no persons be appointed to office, or enlisted into said Battalions, but such as are good seamen, or so acquainted with maritime affairs as to be able to serve to advantage by sea when required;

that they be enlisted and commissioned to serve for and during the present war between Great Britain and the colonies, unless dismissed by order of Congress: that they be distinguished by the names of the first and second battalions of American Marines, and that they be considered as part of the number which the continental Army before Boston is ordered to consist of.

Ordered, That a copy of the above be transmitted to the General.
(Journal of the Continental Congress (Philadelphia) Friday, November 10, 1775)

Tun Tavern

The historic Tun, opened in 1686 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, stands as a legendary birthplace of American history, widely recognized for the founding of the United States Marine Corps in 1775 and serving as a significant meeting place for early Freemasons and revolutionary leaders.

The building once stood as a vital gathering place in early America, where influential leaders convened, lively debate ensued, and the vision of the nation was shaped. (Tun Legacy Foundation)



On November 10, 1775, Robert Mullan, the proprietor of the Tavern and an acquaintance of Captain Samuel Nicholas, was commissioned as a first lieutenant of the new force, was commissioned by an act of Congress “to raise the first two battalions of Marines”, under the leadership of Captain Samuel Nicholas, the first appointed Commandant of the Continental Marines.

According to tradition, Tun Tavern was where the Continental Marines held their first recruitment drive. This resulted in the Tun Tavern being acknowledged as the birthplace of the United States Marine Corps. Each year on November 10th, around the world Marines toast the Marine’s birthplace on the most significant date in the history of the Corps. (Tun Tavern)

Marines in the Revolution

A Marine is a soldier who serves at sea on a vessel of war either as part of its crew or as part of a military expedition under naval supervision. At various times a Marine has been called a ‘maritime soldier,’ a ‘sea soldier,’ and a ‘soldier of the ocean.’

The two battalions, termed the First and Second Battalions of American Marines, would consist of one colonel, two lieutenant colonels, and two majors, with the remaining commissioned and non-commissioned officer corps structured along the lines of a Continental Army regiment. Excluding officers, each battalion would have 500 privates assigned to it.

The two battalions would be further subdivided into ten companies of 50 privates plus officers. The reason given for this breakdown was “that in fitting out any ship of War one of these Companies would compleatly man a small Vessell and two of them make a large Proportion of Marines for the largest.”

An important requirement for both officers and men was that all should have served in the merchant service, or be acquainted with maritime affairs so as to be able to serve “to advantage by sea, when required.” (Charles Smith)

Among the early ships in this fleet were the Alfred, Columbus, Andrew Doria, Cabot, Providence and Fly — later joined by the Hornet and Wasp, which had been fitted out in Baltimore.

Esek Hopkins was designated by the Naval Committee as commander in chief of the fleet and boarded the Alfred. When the Marines received their ship assignments, Nicholas, his two lieutenants and approximately enlisted 60 Marines joined Hopkins on the Alfred.

The Alfred had an undeniable presence - flagship of the Continental fleet commanded by Commodore Esek Hopkins. In early January 1776, Continental Marines would board her and six other ships and within two months, land and occupy the British island of New Providence in the Bahamas.

In the Continental Marines’ first battle encounter, two weeks to the day after leaving, ships of the Continental Fleet under Esek Hopkins rendezvoused north of Nassau harbor in the early morning hours of Sunday, March 3, 1776.

A short time before noon, 230 Marines and 50 seamen under the command of Marine Captain Samuel Nicholas jumped from longboats into the surf, about two miles east of the fort. Carrying Tower muskets, cartridge boxes, bayonets, and wearing a variety of civilian coats, white vests and breeches, and hats, the Marines gathered ashore in preparation for their march toward the fort.

The Continental Marines, in their first amphibious assault, captured Fort Montagu in a battle as “bemused as it was bloodless.”

After resting the night in the fort, the invasion force completed the job of securing the island by taking Fort Nassau and arresting Governor Montfort Browne the next morning. (US Marine Corps, History and Museums Division)



Later, of Washington’s force of about twenty-four hundred men with whom he crossed the Delaware on that momentous Christmas Eve, 1776, more than six hundred were Marines.

These were made up of the “Famous Battalion” of Major Samuel Nicholas, the Marine Guards of the Andrea Doria, Hancock, Montgomery, and other vessels.

Coming as they did, as a fresh, well-fed, well-equipped, well-trained re-enforcement to Washington’s worn-out veterans, exhausted by the constant forced marches and desperate rear-guard actions of their retreat across the Jerseys, they may well have been the factor, which supplied the fresh strength and aggressive force, which made possible the decisive strategic successes of Trenton and Princeton. (Maj Edwin N McClelland & Capt John H Craige)

In many instances [Marines] preserved the vessels to the country, by suppressing the turbulence of their ill-assorted crews, and the effect of their fire, not only then, but in all the subsequent conflicts, under those circumstances in which it could be resorted to, has usually been singularly creditable to their steadiness and discipline.”

“The history of the navy, even at that early day, as well as in these later times, abounds with instances of the gallantry and self-devotion of this body of soldiers, and we should be unfaithful to our trust, were we not to add, that it also furnishes too many proofs of the forgetfulness of its merits by the country.” (Cooper)

With the Treaty of Paris, ending the American Revolutionary War, and the discharge of Marine Lieutenant Thomas Elwood in September 1783, Continental Marines passed from the scene.

For more than seven years, this small force did its part to achieve final victory against the British, but the years took their toll.

From this small beginning the United States Marine Corps grew into a powerful force for the nation's security. (Smith)

Following the Revolutionary War and the formal re-establishment of the Marine Corps on July 11, 1798, Marines saw action in the quasi-war with France, landed in Santo Domingo, and took part in many operations against the Barbary pirates along the “Shores of Tripoli”.

Information here is primarily from US Marine Corps, US Marine Corps, History and Museums Division, Charles Smith, J Fenimore Cooper, (Maj Edwin N McClelland & Capt John H Craige, Tun Tavern and Tun Legacy Foundation.

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the American Revolution, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young