

An Archive for the Marine Corps

by James Ginther, PhD¹

In September 2017, the U.S. Marine Corps opened its first purpose-built facility for its History Division. This facility at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, houses the historians and archivists, publishing staff, and support facilities that make up the division. Though the division was established in the adjutant and inspector's office on 8 September 1919, the concept of a purpose-built facility for preserving the historical documents of the Marine Corps is much older.² Such a facility was first proposed back in the era of Commandant Archibald Henderson's Marine Corps (1820–1959), and like the current Archives, it was tied to attempts to improve education and professionalization in the Marine Corps.

The idea was first proposed by Major Henry Ball Tyler in the 1850s. At that time, Tyler was serving as adjutant and inspector of the Marine Corps, a position that placed him second only to Brevet Brigadier General Archibald Henderson. Tyler is one of the more interesting and much-neglected characters of the era. He entered the Marine Corps in 1823 with a commission as a second lieutenant from Prince William County, Virginia, after an unsuccessful stint at West Point—a mere generation away from the rees-

tablishment of the Corps under Marine Corps Commandant Colonel William Ward Burrows (1798–1805) during the administration of President John Adams. Tyler entered a Corps that had emerged from the War of 1812 with a solid reputation yet suffered from dissension among its officers. The controversy over the dismissal of Commandant Anthony Gale set off a competition among rivals that culminated in the promotion of Archibald Henderson, a dark-horse candidate, to succeed him. The upheaval created factions, brought to light irregularities in management, and raised questions about the direction of the Marine Corps that plagued the officer corps during Tyler's entire 38-year career with the Corps.³ As a result, Tyler would serve in one of the more colorful and revered periods of Marine Corps history and served under only two Commandants—Archibald Henderson and John Harris—both of whom he would come to loathe for what he perceived as their lack of willingness to act to improve the Corps' situation.

Throughout the first 20 years of his service, Tyler saw a rotation of long periods of sea service, barracks duty, and assignments in Washington that allowed him

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² *Marine Corps Order (MCO) 53, Establishment of the Historical Department, Adjutant and Inspector's Division, Headquarters, Marine Corps* (Series 1919) (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 8 September 1919), copy held by Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

³ Alan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, rev. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1991), 53–56. The charges and specifications against Gale, the reaction of the officer corps, and the resultant elevation of Henderson are documented in the Correspondence of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Record Group (RG) 127, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, DC. See, in particular, correspondence of Samuel Miller with Anthony Gale and Archibald Henderson, same collection.

to experience the Marine Corps from multiple points of view. He also seems to have spent an inordinately large amount of time assigned to duty on courts-martial. His only extended period of field service was as regimental adjutant during the Creek War in 1836.⁴ In June 1857, Tyler led a platoon of Marines to quell riots that had broken out in Washington, DC. Tyler's Marines were disciplined and able to get the situation under control, but not without difficulty, causing Tyler to question the preparedness of the Navy Yard Marines for a military crisis. The experience seems to have been the tipping point in his thinking about the preparedness of the Corps to face potential emergencies and its overall efficiency and accountability. After this, he would lobby hard for reforms he felt would strengthen the training and efficiency of the Corps. Through these experiences, Tyler became convinced that if the Marine Corps was going to be a viable part of the nation's military structure, it would need reform with more focused training, better recruiting, and stricter accountability to the of Congress.⁵ Tyler carried these convictions with him when he assumed the duties of the adjutant and inspector of the Marine Corps (1857–61). They would eventually cause him to run afoul of Henderson (1820–59) and later Henderson's successor, Colonel John Harris (1859–64), and may have ultimately led to his decision to leave the Service altogether.⁶

It was this last assignment as adjutant and inspector that would convince Tyler of the need for a facility dedicated to the collection, preservation, and accessibility of Marine Corps records. Early in his tenure, Tyler clashed with Henderson about his actual duties. His predecessor, Brevet Lieutenant Colonel

Parke G. Howle, had been in ill health for a number of years and was rarely present at Headquarters. Tyler assumed the position upon Howle's death in 1857. As he began settling in, he discovered irregularities that caused him concern. It would be difficult to say with certainty that Tyler's motivations in raising these issues were wholly altruistic, but he recognized that part of accomplishing the reforms he sought to implement in the Marine Corps meant stricter inspection of units and preservation of key documentation at Headquarters.⁷ Both would provide him with the information necessary to confirm that the Corps was operating within the law and remained a viable fighting force in the nation's defense structure, particularly in the face of the growing sectional crisis in the country.

Tyler reported some of his concerns in a letter addressed to the secretary of the Navy on 22 September 1858 outlining evidence of "maladministration of the Marine Corps," which Tyler stated was "traceable to an absence of military regulations." These irregularities, Tyler contended, were rooted in the usurpation of the duties of adjutant and inspector by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, demonstrable from evidence in the records (or lack thereof) maintained by the adjutant and inspector's office. Among the irregularities cited by Tyler were: violations of legally mandated recruiting standards; recruiting beyond legal limits set by Congress; recruiting and paying for

⁴ "Summary of Service Henry Ball Tyler, late Major USMC," box 16, folder 9, Ralph W. Donnelly Papers, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Simmons History Center, Quantico, VA.

⁵ See Henry B. Tyler letter to Josiah Watson, 17 October 1860; Henry B. Tyler letter to Isaac Toucey, 26 August 1859; Henry B. Tyler letter to Isaac Toucey, 30 November 1860; Henry B. Tyler letter to Isaac Toucey, 27 September 1858, all RG 127, Records of the United States Marine Corps: Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Adjutant and Inspector's Department, General Records, Correspondence, Letters Sent, August 1855–October 1861, NARA.

⁶ Michael Edward Krivdo, "What Are Marines For?: The United States Marine Corps in the Civil War" (doctoral diss., Texas A&M University, 2011), 161.

⁷ Like most people, Tyler seems to have had a mixture of motivations for leaving the Service. His experience with the riot convinced him that the Marine Corps was unprepared to face a real military emergency and so he instituted programs to better train and equip Marines that the chain of command did little to endorse or expand. He routinely came into conflict with Henderson and Harris on the duties and responsibilities of the adjutant and inspector and had in the past come into conflict with them over the authority that could be properly exercised over Marine officers by naval officers. His correspondence regarding irregular expenditures and discharge practices fell on deaf ears. See Krivdo, "What Are Marines For?," 162–63; Henry B. Tyler letter to Josiah B. Watson 17 October 1860, RG 127, Records of the United States Marine Corps: Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, Adjutant and Inspector's Department, General Records, Correspondence, Letters Sent, August 1855–October 1861, NARA; "Court Martial," *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), first edition, 11 March 1856, 2, Library of Congress; Henry B. Tyler Sr. letter to Toucey, HQMC, 26 August 1859 and 1 December 1860, RG 80, Entry 14, NARA; and Toucey letter to Tyler Sr., Navy Dept., Washington, DC, 31 December 1860, RG 80, Entry 1: "Letters Sent, 1798–1884," NARA. Several other examples of these exchanges exist within this source.

a Marine Corps Band in violation of Congressionally authorized manpower limits; illegally authorizing Service bounty lands for deserters; appointing and paying the Commandant's son as an aide de camp; and the retention of the rank and privileges of brevet brigadier general in violation of the provisions of the law establishing that rank.⁸

As the means of redressing these irregularities, Tyler lobbied for three main remedies: adoption of U.S. Army regulations to define the duties and responsibilities of the Marine Corps staff; a stronger definition of the duties of the office of the adjutant and inspector; and the construction of a purpose-built repository to hold, protect, and make available the Corps' records.⁹ The reason for this last recommendation stems from a conviction that the Marine Corps records needed to be maintained as vital evidence for the adjutant and inspector to evaluate the Corps' progress toward reform, its professionalization, and its fulfillment of its legal obligations. On 7 September 1857, to Secretary of the Navy Isaac Toucey, Tyler wrote:

Sir:

I have the honor to submit to you for your inspection and recommendation, and through you to the Hon: the Secretary of the Navy a drawing designed

as a plan of an office for the Adjutant and Inspector of the Marine Corps. This plan with the estimated cost of the building was made by Mr. Clark, the architect of the Patent and Gen'l [General] Post Office Building. You will perceive that the building is to be fire proof, one story high, and to contain two rooms, with a passage or Hall between them. There has never been an office built for the Adjutant and Inspector of the Marine Corps. He at present occupies for that purpose two of the Barrack rooms (mens [sic] Quarters) these [sic] rooms have the Garrison cook room on one side and the Bake House on the other, it is apparent from their locations that they are liable at any moment to take fire and should the building catch fire on either side, these rooms with the records of this office would be consumed in the general conflagration. These rooms are moreover too damp for the preservation of papers and too dusty for an office; if the papers are not removed to another building, they will in a short time become damaged by the dampness of the rooms; and in the event of fire, their destruction is inevitable.¹⁰

In this recommendation, Tyler was very forward-thinking for his time. Codification of archival theory in the United States dates back to Theodore Roosevelt Schellenberg's seminal work beginning in the 1930s and culminating in the publication of *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* in 1956. Yet, in his proposal, Tyler shows consideration for many of the principles we consider essential to modern archival practice. Tyler's proposal is steeped in the belief in the evidential value of records and their usefulness in documenting, evaluating, and analyzing how the Marine Corps

⁸ *Service bounty lands* refers to land grants given by Congress as a reward to those who had served honorably in the military forces of the United States as an incentive to enlistment. Tyler's motivations are unclear. Certainly, he did have the best interests of the Corps in mind, however, Tyler stood to gain considerably in power and influence over the Corps at the expense of his rivals, giving him a chance to enhance his own prestige and potential for promotion. Tyler continued to doggedly pursue reform of the management and training of the Marine Corps long after Henderson and Harris or Secretary of the Navy Toucey showed any sign of willingness to act on his complaints. Henry B. Tyler letter to Isaac Toucey, 22 September 1858, RG 80, General Records of the Department of the Navy, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Navy, General Records, Letters Received, Letters from the Commandant and Other Officers of the Marine Corps, NARA. Tyler follows this letter with several like it during the succeeding two years, all contained in the source cited; Krivdo, "What Are Marines For?," 346.

⁹ For example, see Henry B. Tyler letter to Isaac Toucey, 29 July 1857; Henry B. Tyler letter to Isaac Toucey, 7 September 1857, hereafter Tyler letter, 7 September 1857; Henry B. Tyler letter to Isaac Toucey, 1 June 1858; Henry B. Tyler letter to Isaac Toucey, 22 September 1858, all in RG 80, General Records of the Department of the Navy, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Navy: General Records, Letters Received, Letters from the Commandant and Other Officers of the Marine Corps, NARA.

¹⁰ Tyler letter, 7 September 1857.

carried out its duties. This documentation would be invaluable in measuring progress toward professionalization as well as proving the Corps was following through on its obligations. It also demonstrates a concern for safeguarding those records from theft and damage and a cognizance that the conditions under which the records were kept were detrimental to the survival of the information they contained. The building design reflects consideration for the basic functions of a modern archive: accession, access, reference, preservation, and security of the records.

Furthermore, Tyler's building would be purpose-built to modern architectural standards and designed in such a way as to consider in its construction the long-term preservation and accessibility to the records of the Corps. For instance, Tyler's insistence on a free-standing brick structure and a central hallway significantly reduce the threat to the records posed by fire, humidity, and dust in the current environment. The provision for a room dedicated to records storage showed Tyler understood the need to secure them, both for their preservation and for accountability. It also demonstrated an understanding of the irreplaceable nature and value of the evidence they contained. The separate office allowed controlled access to the records, which made them readily available while protecting their integrity and security. Finally, creating a freestanding brick building for housing the Marine Corps' records showed an understanding of environmental factors that might shorten a record's useful life. All these ideas are central to modern archival theory and document preservation.¹¹

In the end, many of Tyler's critiques and ideas for reform would go unheeded. His frustrations eventually would lead him to resign his commission and take a commission in the Confederate States Marine Corps (CSMC), along with many of his reform-minded brethren with combat experience. Tyler was commissioned a lieutenant colonel, the second ranking officer in the CSMC. He trained and led a CSMC battalion in Pensacola, Florida, and later served as a brigade commander in the Army of Pensacola un-

til January 1862, when he was dismissed by General Braxton Bragg for negligence. His military history is checkered after that. He did staff duty sitting on various courts martial and then seems to have been banished—for reasons unknown—to Lynchburg, Virginia, where he was paroled in 1865, claiming to have taken no further part in the war after leaving Pensacola.¹²

Tyler fell on hard times after the war. He had lost substantial wealth during the war when the federal government confiscated and resold the land he owned in the District of Columbia under the provisions of the Confiscation Act of 1863. He would later enlist the help of friends to help him to try and regain citizenship and regain this property through the courts. These efforts failed. To improve his fortunes, Tyler bought and operated the Union Hotel in Fairfax, Virginia. He died at his home in Fairfax County on 17 December 1879.¹³

However, Tyler's dream for a purpose-built archival facility for the Marine Corps remained alive. The first steps toward this were taken in the creation of the Historical Branch within the Office of the Adjutant and Inspector of the Marine Corps in 1919. The goal was to preserve and make accessible the historical records of the Marine Corps and to help get its story before the public. After World War II, the older records held by that office were transferred to the National Archives and Records Administration to become the basis of Record Group 127 to preserve them for future generations. Efforts to expand Marine Corps archival holdings outside the records of Headquarters began in the 1950s with the creation of

¹² Krivdo, "What Are Marines For?," 166–68; and David M. Sullivan, *The United States Marines in the Civil War: The Final Year* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Books, 2000), 260–61.

¹³ See Correspondence in Henry B. Tyler Case File, Case Files of Applications of Former Confederates for Presidential Pardons (Amnesty Papers), 1865–1867, RG 94, microfilm roll 70, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC; "Local Matters—Important Action in the United States Circuit Court—Quashing of Indictments for Treason—Mr. Davis Free at Last," *Richmond (VA) Dispatch*, 12 February 1869, 1; "Letter from Fairfax," *Alexandria (VA) Gazette*, 8 December 1866, 1; "Local News—Legality of the Confiscation Act," *Alexandria Gazette*, 6 March 1867, 3; "Confiscation of Property in the U.S. Capital and in Alexandria, Va.," *Abingdon (VA) Virginian*, 14 August 1863, 1; "Local News—In the U.S. Supreme Court," *Alexandria Gazette*, 30 March 1870, 3; *Washington Post*, 20 December 1879, 4.

¹¹ T. R. Schellenberger, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003), 8, 10, 15–16, 162–64.

the Marine Corps Personal Papers Collection. Then Colonel (later lieutenant general) Victor H. Krulak created the Historical Amphibious Files in the James Carson Breckinridge Professional Library of the Marine Corps Schools (which later grew into the current Marine Corps University Research Library branch of the Library of the Marine Corps) to document Marine Corps innovation in amphibious warfare in the post-Korean War era.

In 1965, Commandant Wallace M. Greene Jr. created the Commandant's Advisory Committee on Marine Corps History. The committee's work created the Marine Corps Museum with an archival component at Marine Corps Base Quantico and ultimately the Marine Corps Historical Division with its archive in 1971, which until 2005 resided in the Washington Navy Yard. Under the guidance of this committee, the Marine Corps further developed its cache of historical resources, including the Command Chronology Program, the Oral History Program, and Historical Reference Branch. In 1992, as part of the vision for Marine Corps University, the Marine Corps Research Center (now the Alfred M. Gray Research Center) opened with an archival component that would make historical materials available for the students of the Marine Corps schools. These two archives were merged in 2005 within the Gray Research Center aboard Quantico. Four years later, the staff of the Archives Branch, Library of the Marine Corps Quantico, and Marine Corps Historical Division began planning to build, for the first time, a dedicated facility for historical research and publication, and the collection, preservation, and access to historical resources of the Marine Corps, thereby laying the ground work to fulfill Tyler's vision of a purpose-built facility to provide for the collection and longer term preservation of Marine Corps historical resources.¹⁴

Tyler's vision for a purpose-built archive for the Marine Corps was finally realized in 2017 with the opening of the Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons Marine Corps History Center aboard Quantico. This facility now houses the Archives Branch of the Marine Corps History Division and was built to National Archives standards to house historical records of continuing value to the Marine Corps, and its operational, training, and educational programs.

Today, the Archives Branch maintains more than 5,800 personal papers collections representing the experiences of individual Marines of all ranks and military occupational specialties serving in all climes throughout the history of the Marine Corps. In addition, it maintains significant research collections related to the activities and campaigns of Marine Corps units, the Marine Corps Combat Development Command, the Training and Education Command, and the Marine Corps Systems Command. It is also home to thousands of films and photographs. Archives serves a broad and varied patron base from Headquarters Marine Corps to the Marine Corps schools, the Corps' operating forces and commands, academic researchers from universities around the country, and federal agencies like the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The archive replies to nearly 4,000 requests for information per year and another 1,500 requests per year from the Veterans Administration alone.

Tyler's vision for an archive for the Marine Corps has been realized. Day to day, it serves Marines, veterans, academics, government agencies, and researchers around the world. The archive provides an accessible link to the past for the Fleet Marine Force, Headquarters, and the students of Marine Corps University and the Training and Education Command. It is an invaluable resource for documenting the activities of the Corps, serving as a source for accountability, and a reference point for the developmental, educational, and training needs of the Marine Corps. As such it will continue to fulfill the need envisioned by Tyler more than a century ago well into the future.

¹⁴ For more on the expansion of Marine Corps historical and archival resources in the post-World War II period, see Col Frank C. Caldwell, "Every Marine an Historian," *Marine Corps Gazette* 50, no. 3 (March 1966): 33-38; Annette Amerman, "Every Marine an Historian: The Sequel," *Marine Corps Gazette* 96, no. 3 (March 2012): 77-79; and Kara Newcomer, "History Division on the World Wide Web," *Fortitudine* 34 no. 5, 2009. These two publications are treasure troves of information on the developments in the Marine Corps historical program.