

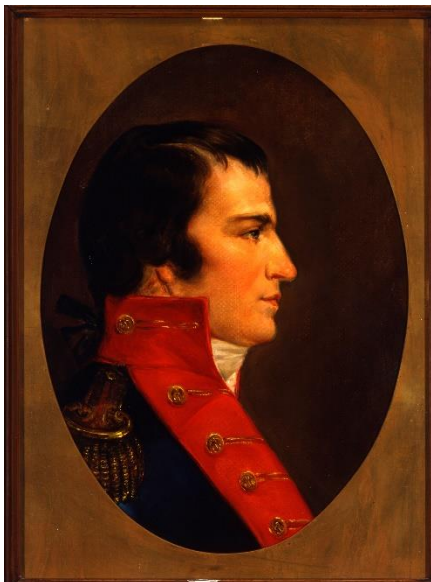


MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION

Quasi War

The United States had gained its independence, but it lacked the military and economic security that Great Britain once provided. In 1789, the new Constitution replaced the Articles of Confederation, greatly strengthening the federal government and its ability to control foreign policy and taxation. The country, however, remained economically vulnerable until it could conduct trade overseas without foreign interference. Tension and then war between European powers created a chaotic international situation that impacted American commerce and threatened to draw the United States into the fighting. Despite U.S. neutrality, the French and British seized or otherwise interfered with American merchant ships on the high seas. In addition, subject states of the Ottoman Empire along the North African coast preyed on the vulnerable American merchant fleet in Mediterranean and Atlantic waters.

In response to the threats against the commerce and sovereignty of the United States, Congress established a permanent Navy on 27 March 1794 and provided for the construction of six frigates. On 20 April 1796, Congress authorized the construction of the first three frigates—



*Portrait of William W. Burrows, 2nd CMC
by LtCol John J. Capolino.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art
Collection*

USS *United States*, USS *Constellation*, and USS *Constitution*—all of which were launched in 1797. In March 1798, Secretary of War James McHenry recommended that a Navy Department be created alongside the War Department and an organization of Marines be formally established. On 30 April 1798, Congress enacted legislation that created the Navy Department.

The formal establishment of the United States Marine Corps followed on 11 July 1798, when Congress passed An Act for the Establishing and Organizing a Marine Corps. President John Adams nominated Major William Ward Burrows as the first Commandant of the United States Marine Corps on 12 July 1798.

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- For more information, see:
 - [*Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment*](#)
 - [*180 Landings of U.S. Marines, 1800–1934*](#)

While the United States established its naval Services, France disrupted U.S. commerce in the West Indies. President Adams attempted to avoid war by negotiating with France over the seizure of merchant ships and the failure to recognize American neutrality. Adams's diplomatic effort ended when it was publicly revealed that the French foreign minister demanded bribes and a loan before formal negotiations with U.S. representatives could begin. What became known as the XYZ Affair outraged Americans and led to an undeclared naval war with France beginning in 1798, fought primarily in the Caribbean and referred to as the Quasi-War. The most prominent and successful actions of the war came when USS *Constellation* captured the French frigate *L'Insurgente* in 1799 and the frigate *La Vengeance* the following year. Marines fought bravely in each action and in several other duels with French warships.

U.S. Marines participated in several skirmishes and battles throughout the Caribbean in the Quasi-War. During the Haitian Revolution against French rule (1791–1804), the United States cooperated with revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture. Opposing Louverture was General André Rigaud, whose troops operated from large barges to prey on American shipping around the island. On 1 January 1800, Marines aboard the schooner USS *Experiment* (1799) fought in the defense of their ship lying near Saint-Marc, Haiti (a.k.a. Saint Domingue until 1804), against a heavy attack of about 500 of Rigaud's men. The Americans drove off the attackers after sinking several barges. Another noteworthy Marine Corps action occurred on 11 May 1800, when a group of sailors from *Constitution* and its Marine detachment, commanded by Captain Daniel Carmick, seized the French privateer *Sandwich*, held in Puerto Plata, on the north coast of Santo Domingo (later the



Cutting out the Sandwich by Col Charles H. Waterhouse.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection



Dominican Republic). Captain Carmick's Marines and several sailors transferred to the sloop *Sally*. Concealed aboard *Sally*, the Americans sailed into the port without alerting the privateers and took *Sandwich* by surprise, after which they captured the local fort, spiked all the cannon, and sailed away with the two ships.

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The Convention of 1800 ended the Quasi-War and normalized American relations with France. With the war concluded, Marines had compiled a successful record in the naval Services' defense of American commerce and sovereignty.