



# MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION

## Major Samuel Nicholas

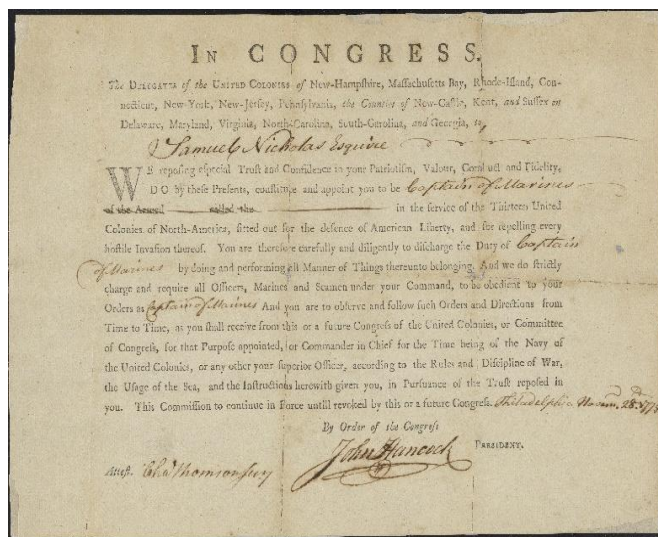
Samuel Nicholas was born in Philadelphia in 1744. A blacksmith's son, little is known of his early life, but he was likely connected to the city's elite. On 28 November 1775, Nicholas became the first commissioned officer of the Continental Marines. He is considered the first Commandant by tradition, though no such position existed in the Continental Marines. As the senior officer, responsibility for recruiting, provisioning, and other administrative tasks generally fell to Nicholas. He spent most of his time in service in Philadelphia, where he attended to the Continental Marines' affairs and advocated on their behalf to the Continental Congress.

Nicholas commanded Marines at sea and on land during the war's early years. In January 1776, he took command of *Alfred*'s Marine



Portrait of Samuel Nicholas, 1st CMC by Col Donna J. Neary.

National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection



Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division

detachment as a captain. That March, Nicholas led a landing party of Marines during the New Providence raid, capturing Fort Montagu and Fort Nassau in the Bahamas. While sailing to New England from the Bahamas, Nicholas led *Alfred*'s Marines during the ship's fight with the British frigate *Glasgow* in April 1776.

In December 1776, now-Major Nicholas led a small Marine battalion

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detached to assist General George Washington's forces during the campaign in New Jersey. After being prevented from crossing the Delaware River to join in the first Battle of Trenton, Nicholas and his Marines saw action against the British at Assunpink Creek and the Battle of Princeton. After his return to Philadelphia, Nicholas continued recruiting and carried out various administrative tasks that Congress assigned him. He returned to civilian life after the Continental Marines were disbanded following the end of the war in 1783. Major Samuel Nicholas died in Philadelphia on 27 August 1790.