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HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

What Marine History Is For

HISTORY, HERITAGE, AND THE ORIGINS OF THE U.S. MARINE CORPS

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> There is wisdom and depth in philosophy which always considers the origin and the germ, and glories in history as one consistent epic.[1]

Heritage and history are both useful for military/naval institutions like the Marine Corps. Heritage uses the past to celebrate or preserve culture and traditions. Marine heritage targets as broad a general audience as possible and passes down legacies of combat prowess, bravery, and *esprit de corps*, all of which are important to forming a corporate identity and projecting a bright and positive public image. This curated past, however, approaches what historian Sir Michael Howard called *myth-making*, or "the creation of an image of the past, through careful selection and interpretation, in order to create or sustain emotions or beliefs."[2] The Marine Corps uses history, however, not just to inspire, but to educate and enhance readiness. Scholarly military history targets a narrower and more academically inclined audience to promote understanding of past events by placing them in context, tracing both change and continuity, identifying and explaining causation, and illuminating complexity.[3] Rather than focus solely on the dazzling moments of the Corps' past, however, historical scholarship must also illuminate the Corps' murky episodes that, as Lord Acton once noted, "strengthens, and straightens, and extends the mind."[4]

Perhaps no period of U.S. Marine Corps history has undergone the mixing of history and heritage more than the years between the American Revolution and the War of 1812. The Marines today have a century-old tradition of celebrating the Corps' birthday on 10 November every year. Three dates, however, are important to understanding how historians have interpreted the U.S. Marine Corps' origins. The first, of course, is 10 November 1775, which marks the beginning of the Continental Marines that fought during the Ameri-

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[1] Lord Acton, *A Lecture on the Study of History Delivered at Cambridge, June 11, 1895* (London: Macmillan, 1911), 6.

[2] Michael Howard, "The Use and Abuse of Military History," *Parameters* 11, no. 1 (1981): 9.

[3] Michael S. Neiberg, "Reflections of Change: Achieving Intellectual Overmatch Through Historical Mindedness" (unpublished paper, U.S. Army War College, undated), 23, accessed 14 August 2025; and Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, "What Does It Mean to Think Historically," *Perspectives on History*, 1 January 2007.

[4] Acton, *A Lecture on the Study of History Delivered at Cambridge, June 11, 1895*, 40.

can Revolution. The second is 11 July 1798, when Congress created a permanent U.S. Marine Corps to serve with the Navy during the Quasi-War with France. The third date is 1 November 1921, when the 13th Commandant of the Marine Corps, Major General John A. Lejeune, designated 10 November 1775 as the official birthday of the Service. Based on this reckoning, the Marines turned 250 in 2025. There is certainly precedent in beginning the Marine Corps' history in 1775.[5] It is important to note, however, that celebrating the Corps' birthday on 10 November is a function of heritage, while history requires acknowledging that the Corps did not exist as an official and permanent institution until 11 July 1798. The fact that this is far from a settled fact among authors of Marine history, however, reveals how a blurring of the lines between history and heritage defines much of the historiography surrounding the U.S. Marine Corps' beginnings.

This essay examines single-volume comprehensive histories of the Marine Corps published since 1875. It argues that how historians present and interpret the institution's beginnings has evolved gradually and unevenly during the past 150 years. This evolution has been driven by the authors' backgrounds, their purpose for writing, and their historical contexts. This essay is organized into three partially overlapping periods. The earliest publications from the late nineteenth century to the Great War era were popular histories for general audiences written mostly by journalists who mixed heritage and history by treating 10 November 1775 as the birth of the U.S. Marine Corps. Beginning in the interwar period and lasting into the 1980s, the first Marine historians with professional academic training divorced heritage from history by producing more scholarly books that recognized 10 November 1775 and 11 July 1798 as distinct birthdates for the Continental Marines and U.S. Marines, respectively. Then, starting in the 1970s and going into the early 2000s, a mix of Marines with backgrounds in academic historical research and professional journalism treated 1798 as the actual birth date of the Marine Corps, if not the official one.

This essay addresses single-volume narrative histories because those books have been the most widely read and impactful. Additionally, this selection narrows the analysis to a singular, more manageable historiographical thread. Included as exceptions, however, are several studies about Marines during the American Revolution and the early national period because of their direct relevance to the historiography. The plethora of stand-alone articles, book chapters, and chronologies are excluded because of the inevitable limits of time and space. Despite the evolution in how authors interpreted the Corps' origins, this essay asserts that the history/heritage dichotomy is engrained in these works because of what they were written for. The Marine historians discussed here rarely put pen to paper for the sake of historical accuracy alone. Their motivations were both professional and sentimental, which always allows room for heritage.

Early Histories to 1921: To Rescue from Obscurity

By 1920, Marine Corps history, to the extent that the field existed, was a collaborative effort between a handful of journalists and Marine officers who targeted the public for their primary audience, not historians or academics. These books reflect the Marine Corps' attempts to use its history for public relations and publicity and their practice of working with journalists to expand their reach. The Marine Corps survived numerous attempts between the Andrew Jackson and William Howard Taft administrations to, as Marines saw it, abolish or severely weaken the Service. For the Marine Corps of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, therefore, public relations was an important front in a larger campaign of

[5] *Marine Corps Lore*, Marine Corps Historical Reference Series no. 22 (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1960), 1–2; *Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2025), 14; MajGen Ben H. Fuller, "The United States Marine Corps," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 56, no. 332 (October 1939): 913–16; and Janis Jorgensen, "246th Birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps: November 10th, 1775 Congress Establishes U.S. Marine Corps," *Naval History*, December 2021.

institutional survival.[6] To this end, Marines began cultivating professional relationships with journalists in the late nineteenth century. By the First World War, the Marine Publicity Bureau in New York City had developed a useful, mutually beneficial relationship with the press. They provided journalists with human interest stories that created favorable press for the Marines in return. The first few Marine Corps histories—M. Almy Aldrich and Captain Richard Strader Collum's *History of the United States Marine Corps*, published in 1875 and 1890, Willis J. Abbot's *Soldiers of the Sea*, published in 1918, and John W. Leonard's *The Story of the United States Marines*—are the products of that relationship.

Captain Collum was the first Marine officer to write a full narrative history of the Marine Corps. While stationed in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1874, he submitted a draft to Henry L. Shepard and Company, publishers. A Boston journalist named M. Almy Aldrich partnered with Collum around this time to help publish the draft. It appears that Collum provided official reports and documentation while Aldrich brought in newspaper accounts of battles. Collum transferred to Washington, DC, in 1875 and then served afloat with the Asiatic Squadron, therefore it is likely that Aldrich finished the draft for publication.[7]

Aldrich and Collum claimed as fact that "the United States Marine Corps came into existences before the organization of the regular Navy." They were not the first to make this assertion in print, however. James Fenimore Cooper had claimed in 1839 that Congress created the Marine Corps before a single naval vessel put to sea.[8] Aldrich and Collum therefore probably based their claim, in part, on Cooper's writings. They, of course, also reference the 10 November 1775 resolution passed by Congress to raise two battalions of Marines in preparation for a naval operation against Halifax, Nova Scotia. The fact that the two battalions were never raised, that the Marine companies that Congress did raise eventually were "Continental Marines" rather than members of a formally established Corps, and that Congress had already made moves to establish a navy four weeks prior, did not seem to matter. The authors only admit that few records of the Marines exist from that period and that the organization disbanded after the war.[9]

It is important to note that the 1875 version appeared during a period of crisis for the Marine Corps. Congress shrunk the Navy's budget from $122 million in 1865 down to $13.5 million by 1880. In 1874, fearing the House of Representatives would either abolish the Marine Corps or place it under the Army, an association of officers met at the Marine barracks in Washington, DC, and decided to publish material to garner public support. Along with the *History of the United States Marine Corps* (when it published), they reprinted the 1864 pamphlet *Information in Regard to the United States Marine Corps*, which was full of praise for Marines from naval officers. These publications became a part of the Corps' lobbying effort to remain a separate Service under the Navy. (Nevertheless, the Corps took deep cuts in 1876. Although Congress promoted Commandant Jacob Zeilin to brigadier general for his service during the Civil War, they reduced the Commandant's office to a colonel's billet once he retired in 1876. The officer corps dwindled by one-third [75–50 officers], promotions stagnated, and the enlisted force

[6] Robert D. Heinl Jr., "The Cat with More than Nine Lives," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (June 1954); a copy of this article is in Charles P. Neimeyer, ed., *On the Corps: USMC Wisdom from the pages of Leatherneck, Marine Corps Gazette, and Proceedings* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 45; Mark R. Folse, *The Globe and Anchor Men: U.S. Marines and American Manhood in the Great War Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2024), 43–48; Colin Colbourn, "Esprit de Marine Corps: The Making of the Modern Marine Corps through Public Relations, 1898–1945" (PhD diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2018), 41–43; and Heather Venable, *How the Few Became the Proud: Crafting the Marine Corps Mystique, 1874–1918* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 101.

[7] Capt Richard Strader Collum, USMC, Historian Biography, Marine Corps History Division (MCHD), Quantico, VA, hereafter Collum biography.

[8] James Fenimore Cooper, *The History of the Navy of the United States of America*, vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley, 1839), 144. Cooper places the date incorrectly on 9 November 1775.

[9] M. Almy Aldrich and Capt Richard S. Collum, *History of the United States Marine Corps* (Boston, MA: Henry L. Shepard, 1875), 33, 44.

shrunk from 3,000 to 2,000 men.)[10] This effort also reveals the beginnings of a behavioral pattern whereby Marines employ and promote a curated version of their past to get through troubling times.[11]

Settling on 10 November 1775, therefore, allowed the authors to show how the Continental Congress recognized the necessity of a body Marines as soon as naval planning began. Additionally, this date not only implied that the Marine Corps was the oldest branch of Service, but it also put the Corps' centennial in the very year the book published: 1875. Collum and Aldrich place little significance on the 1798 bill that formally established the U.S. Marine Corps, calling it only "the re-formation of the organization."[12] For the 1890 edition, Collum moved some chapters around and wrote a new preface, more detailed accounts of the American Revolution, and post-1875 events such as the 1878 and 1889 Paris Expositions, and the 1885 expedition to Panama. Collum's content regarding Marines of the Revolution and the Marine Corps of early national period is the same. His book was published before history professionalized as a field of study in the United States, which may help explain its uncritical nature and how it is meant to portray the Marines in best light possible. As such, much of Collum's work should be regarded as propaganda.[13]

The next narrative histories of the Marine Corps came from journalist Willis J. Abbot (1863–1934) and John W. Leonard in the last year of the First World War.[14] Abbot's *Soldiers of the Sea* aims to tell an exciting story. Similar to Collum, he treats the revolution and early national period as one of great tales of Marine gallantry and valor. Based on the book's organization and content, at least for the years leading up to 1890, it is likely that Willis read Collum's book. For example, like Aldrich and Collum's 1875 edition, Abbot recounts the "tell it to the Marines" anecdote that dates to King Charles II. Willis also follows Collum's assertion that it was on 10 November 1775 that "the true United States Marine Corps was created," without making much distinction between Continental Marines, state marines, or "marines" who served on privateers.[15] He mentions the disbandment of the Continental Navy and Marines after 1783 and their permanent establishment by Congress in 1798, briefly. Leonard's *The Story of the United States Marines* is of the same genus as Abbot's work. It claims the Service came to be on 10 November 1775 and aims to make the Marines a household name by celebrating their valor and courage.[16] *Soldiers of the Sea* and *The Story of the U.S. Marines* would have been of interest to anyone wanting to know more about the Marines who had just won fame on the western front in the summer of 1918.

Like Aldrich and Collum's book, however, these works are meant to glorify the Marines and their role in American history. Neither Abbot nor Leonard provided source notes or a bibliography. The authors clearly worked with Marines in drafting the book, however. The Marine Publicity Bureau published Leonard's book. The last chapter of Abbot's book references Marine Publicity Bureau material directly, and one of the Corps' notable recruiters and publicity

[10] Collum biography; Jack Shulimson, *The Marine Corps Search for a Mission* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 15–16; Jack Shulimson, "Charles G. McCawley, 1876–1891," in *Commandants of the Marine Corps*, eds. Allan R. Millett and Jack Shulimson (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 97–99; and Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, 2d ed. (New York: Free Press, 1991), 101.
[11] Venable, *How the Few Became the Proud*, 51.
[12] Aldrich and Collum, *History of the United States Marine Corps*, 44.
[13] This can be summed up with Cooper's unqualified claim that "at no period of naval history of the world is it probable that marines were more important than during the war of the Revolution"—a statement that perhaps Aldrich and Collum took too much to heart. Cooper, *The History of the Navy of the United States of America*, vol. 1, 145; and Aldrich and Collum, *History of the United States Marine Corps*, 41.
[14] Abbot was a prolific journalist, editor, and author who wrote at least 19 books on American military and naval history. These included several institutional histories of the Navy such as *Naval History of the United States*, vols. 1 and 2 (1890), and *American Merchant Ships and Sailors* (1902). He was a University of Michigan graduate (1887), the managing editor of the *Chicago Times* (1892–93), editor of the *New York Journal* (1896–98), and he joined the *New York American* in 1905. *Soldiers of the Sea: The Story of the United States Marine Corps* (1918) was his 11th book.
[15] Abbot J. Willis, *Soldiers of the Sea: The Story of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1918), 6.
[16] John W. Leonard and Fred F. Chitty, *The Story of the United States Marines: Compiled from Authentic Records, 1740–1919* (New York: Marine Corps Publicity Bureau, 1919), 15–20.

officers, Major Thomas G. Sterrett, provided the foreword. "Mr. Abbot has rendered a notable service in bringing out a work which will, in thrilling narrative and excitement, resemble the imaginings of a Dumas or a Jules Verne, but which deviates not one jot from historical truth," he wrote.[17] Sterrett, a former journalist who had been working for the Marine Publicity Bureau for a long time by 1918, had clearly seen the book's public relations value.

History and Heritage: The Interwar Period to the Cold War

The establishment of the Marine Corps' Historical Section on 8 September 1919 under the command of Major Edwin N. McClellan marked a shift in the production of Marine Corps history and heritage. Major General Commandant George Barnett sent McClellan to France earlier that year to collect documents on Marine activities and engagements during the Great War. This effort resulted in the establishment of the Historical Section on his return and the completion of its first major work, *The United States Marine Corps in the World War*. McClellan served as chief of the Historical Section during the first four years of Major General John A. Lejeune's commandancy, when the Marine Corps faced steep personnel shortages. Similar to Collum, McClellan sought to use the Marine Corps' past to drum up public support.

McClellan's most notable contribution to the study and interpretation of the Corps' past was the role he played in making 10 November the institution's official birthday. On 21 October 1921, Major McClellan submitted a memorandum to Lejeune suggesting that he declare 10 November an official holiday for Marines for two reasons: one having to do with heritage and the other with public relations. First, to impress on each Marine "that he is an important integral part of an Ancient and Honorable Organization," and, second, because public celebrations of the Corps' birthday would "be given wide publicity and create an interest in the Marine Corps among certain classes that would prove of agreeable assistance."[18] Lejeune then issued *Marine Corps Order No. 47* on 1 November 1921 which declared 10 November 1775 as the official birthday of the Marines.[19] This order permanently planted 10 November into not only the Marines' memory, but the public's as well, forever changing how audiences interpret the Corps' origins.

McClellan left the section in 1925 but returned in 1931, which was when he and his staff codified the Historical Section's missions. They were to maintain the Corps' archive, provide correspondence on historical matters, and "cooperate in every practicable way with the officer preparing Marine Corps history." That officer was McClellan, who began work on a comprehensive multivolume history of the Marine Corps.[20] McClellan's book, *History of the United States Marine Corps*, was a massive undertaking of which he only completed one of seven planned volumes. Printed in 1932, volume 1 covers colonial marine activities before 1776; state, privateer, and Continental Marines during the American Revolution; the establishment of the Marine Corps in 1798; the Barbary Wars; and the War of 1812. It has 26 chapters across 1,711 manuscript pages. McClellan's endnotes take up a sizable portion of the total length, which is an incredible boon to researchers. The manuscript's length precluded commercial publication, but the Historical Section sent 200 copies to various repositories to be used as a reference. Chapter three details how and why the Continental Congress and Major General George Washington established naval forces, including large block quotations from the corresponding parties.[21]

McClellan asserts that every resolution for acquiring and outfitting naval vessels during this period

[17] Maj Thomas G. Sterrett as quoted in Abbot, *Soldiers of the Sea*, v.

[18] Maj Edwin N. McClellan, officer-in-charge, Historical Section, to the MajGen Commandant (MajGen John Archer Lejeune), 21 October 1921, copy found in "History of the Marine Corps Birthday Celebration," Archives, MCHD, Quantico, VA.

[19] *Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment*, 14

[20] Annette Amerman, "2014 Foreword," in Maj Edwin N. McClellan, *The United States Marine Corps in the World War*, rev. 3d ed., U.S. Marines in World War I Centennial Commemorative Series (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2014), xv–xvii; and Maj Edwin N. McClellan biographical file, MCHD, Quantico, VA.

[21] Maj Edwin N. McClellan, *History of the United States Marine Corps*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Marine Corps Historical Section, 1931), chap. 3, 18–23.

implied the authorization of enlisting sailors and Marines to serve aboard. He explains how several dates between October and December 1775 could serve as the founding of the Marine Corps and Navy. First, 5 October could be considered the founding date because on that day Congress authorized Washington to arm and equip two vessels "and to give orders for the 'proper encouragement to the marines and seamen' serving on them."[22] Then there is 13 October, which was the date of the official resolution that called for the fitting out of those vessels as well as enlisting sailors and Marines to operate them. In addition, 22 December could very well have been the shared birthday of the Navy and Marine Corps, because it was then that Congress made provisions for commissioning and paying officers to serve in the Continental Navy. McClellan, however, argues that 10 November is the birthday "because that was the day in 1775 Congress authorized an organization, or Corps, of them," meaning a distinct body of Marines as opposed to marines being enlisted in an ad hoc basis for sea duty on board individual vessels.[23]

McClellan interprets the establishment of the Marine Corps in 1798 similarly. Congress created a Navy Department on 30 April 1798 in response to a national emergency. Naturally, the Navy required ships and sailors and Marines to sail them. Instead of the Navy raising Marines for ship duty as needed, Congress created a permanent and distinct Corps with its own commandant and administrative hierarchy, from which detachments of Marines would serve on war vessels. And like his discussion of the Continental Marines, McClellan delves into the congressional records to show the back-and-forth debates on the house floor behind the Marine Corps' establishment and force structure.[24] Although most of this history was never published, McClelland did publish parts of it in the *Marine Corps Gazette* in 1922.[25]

McClellan's research and attention to political and military context set this work apart from any history of the Marine Corps that came before it. His efforts at uncovering how and why the Marines came to be both in the American Revolution and in 1798 are of tremendous value to researchers, especially given his prodigious use of endnotes. To this day, it remains the largest study of the Marines in the colonial and early national periods, which makes his contributions to Marine history *and* heritage second to none.

It was Lieutenant Colonel Clyde H. Metcalf who published the very first scholarly, comprehensive, one-volume study of the Marines. Metcalf commissioned into the Marine Corps in 1912 at age 26. By then, he had a noteworthy academic background.[26] Metcalf took over the Marine Corps Historical Section in 1935 having spent more than two decades in typical Marine officer fashion with service in Guam, France, Nicaragua, and on board various naval vessels. Once there, he took to completing the work begun by McClellan. In preparation for the book project, he enrolled at George Washington University and received a graduate degree in foreign policy and historical research.[27] Therefore, he is the first Marine officer/historian with professional academic training.

Metcalf wanted to write a new kind of Marine Corps history. He did not like Collum's *History of the United States Marine Corps* because it was outdated and painted too rosy a picture of the Corps' past. In a letter to recently retired Commandant John A. Lejeune, he wrote,

> I believe that the Marine Corps and its officers have made mistakes when they were obvious, or the acts were universally condemned by contemporaries the only thing to do in my opinion is to admit the mistake and attempt to place the blame for them. . . . I have acted under the assumption

[22] *Journals of Congress*, vol. 3, as quoted in McClellan, *History of the United States Marine Corps*, 10.
[23] McClellan, *History of the United States Marine Corps*, 10.
[24] McClellan, *History of the United States Marine Corps*, chap. 10, 2, 10–16.
[25] Maj Edwin N. McClellan, "From 1783 to 1798," *Marine Corps Gazette* 7, no. 3 (September 1922): 273–86.
[26] He held a bachelor's degree from the University of Arkansas and completed some graduate studies at the University of Chicago. He had been an instructor at his alma mater, and a high school principal. Clyde Metcalf biographical file, MCHD, Quantico, VA.
[27] Clyde Metcalf biographical file.

> that if future generations are to profit by our experiences they must know about our shortcomings and failures as well as our fine qualities and successes.[28]

This letter illuminated a guiding principle that neither Aldrich, Collum, nor Willis had in writing Marine Corps history. Metcalf's book would be no "polly-anna affair."

Metcalf's *A History of the United States Marine Corps* accomplished several historiographical functions. First, it gave the first serious and deeply researched account of Marine history in a single comprehensive narrative. Second, like McClellan's work, it placed the Marines in historical context by describing the national policies and local conditions necessary to understand land and seaborne operations. Finally, he is the first historian to align the growth and development of the Marine Corps with "forces which brought about the growth of the nation."[29] "It is hoped," he wrote, "that this work will prove to be a contribution to the knowledge of our foreign policy as well as to that pertaining to our naval history."[30] Although writing about a small military/naval Service, he makes a case for Marine Corps history being important to understanding larger themes in American history. His profound linkages of Marine operations to national policies and military strategy makes this book stand far out from those that preceded it.

Metcalf's book has three chapters, about 80 pages, devoted to the Marines' early history. In the opening chapter he makes important distinctions between state navies and marines, marines on board privateers, and the Continental variety. He identifies 13 October 1775 as the date of the first official step the Continental Congress took toward establishing a navy. Regarding the 10 November resolution, he describes it as the first document authorizing the raising of a body of marines.[31] He also points out that this force was never raised but that "the authority contained in the resolution appears to have been issued to form more or less isolated detachments of marines who served throughout the remainder of the American Revolution."[32] Metcalf then narrates Marine activities with Commodore Esek Hopkins's expedition to New Providence, with Washington's Army in New Jersey, in European waters with John Paul Jones, the disastrous Penobscot expedition, and one of the first accounts of Marines under James Willing who raided settlements along the Mississippi river down to New Orleans. The American Revolution, however, did not constitute the "early days of the Marine Corps" as far as Metcalf was concerned.

Those days did not begin until 1798 with the official establishment of the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps in response to French hostilities toward American merchant ships. Like McClellan, Metcalf tied the two Services together very closely since Congress created both for an immediate maritime emergency. Metcalf and McClellan were the first Marine historians to explain what the Navy and Marine Corps were for in the first place: forward presence, convoying merchant ships, and "protecting channels of maritime commerce."[33] National honor was at stake, and it was within that context that the Navy and Marines developed a fighting tradition and martial spirit that they displayed against Barbary Corsairs in 1805 and the British in the War of 1812. Linking the Marine Corps to this larger national imperative is missing from earlier published works.

Going into the Second World War, the Marine Corps now had several books written about its history. Metcalf's was the most in-depth, professional, balanced, and up-to-date. But that did not stop John H. Craige from publishing the last pre–World War II book about Marines in 1941, entitled *What The Citizen Should Know About the Marines*. Born in Pennsylvania in 1886, Craige worked as a reporter and newspaper editor for several years before joining the Marine

[28] Clyde Metcalf to John A. Lejeune, 19 October 1938, as quoted in "Clyde Hill Metcalf—Historian of the Corps," Clyde Metcalf biographical file.
[29] Clyde H. Metcalf, *A History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), vii–viii.
[30] Metcalf, *A History of the United States Marine Corps*, vii.
[31] Metcalf, *A History of the United States Marine Corps*, 11.
[32] Metcalf, *A History of the United States Marine Corps*, 11.
[33] Metcalf, *A History of the United States Marine Corps*, 35.

Corps in 1917. He served in France and Haiti, was one of Commandant Lejeune's aides, and was the chief editor of the *Marine Corps Gazette* before an automobile accident forced him into early retirement in 1935. He had written numerous columns for newspapers, *Marine Corps Gazette* articles, and several books including *Cannibal Cousins* (1934) and *Black Bagdad: The Arabian Nights Adventures of a Marine Captain in Haiti* (1933).[34]

Part history and part journalism, Craige wrote *What the Citizen Should Know About the Marines* to explain to the latest generation of general readers why the Marine Corps exists and define its peace and wartime missions. He devotes chapters to the Corps' contemporary force structure, the kinds of weapons Marines use, and their expeditionary and amphibious capabilities. Craige also uses history to highlight some of the Marine Corps' traditional activities and show how the Service has evolved since the eighteenth century. To do so, he relied on three works: Metcalf's *A History of the United States Marine Corps*, a manuscript copy of McClellan's *Marine Corps History*, and Captain Harry A. Ellsworth's *One Hundred and Eighty Landings of the United States Marines, 1800–1934*.[35]

Craige organized the book thematically with chapters devoted to Marines serving afloat with the Navy, detached with the Army, and conducting counterguerrilla and contingency operations. Each chapter uses historical vignettes to flesh out each theme. "Organization and Beginnings" is the chapter in which Craige discusses how and why the United States created a body of Marines. Unlike McClellan and Metcalf, Craige places no real significance on either 10 November 1775 or 11 July 1798, even though he acknowledges how the former is "generally accepted as the birthday of the United States Marine Corps."[36]

Where McClellan and Metcalf focused on the political and strategic context surrounding the Corps' beginnings, Craige emphasizes geography. Isolated from the west by a vast trackless continent, and from the east by a great ocean, the colonies communicated, traded, and traveled mostly by sea, which imbued them all with a maritime character. There existed no theoretical nor doctrinal debates about the necessity or organization of naval forces, including Marines, in the colonies. Craige argues that those discussions did not become relevant until Alfred T. Mahan's late nineteenth-century writings. Rather, the colonists knew "instinctively the part that a powerful navy and a body of well-trained marines could play in the scheme of their defense in view of the facts of the American geographical position."[37] Therefore, the Continental Marines of 1775 and the Marine Corps of 1798 owe their existence as much toward geography as anything else.

History, however, is not the book's primary purpose, and Craige was not a Marine Corps historian per se. His discipline was journalism, and that comes across in the absence of any critical analysis of Marine actions in the American Revolution, the undeclared war with the French, and the War of 1812. He chose his vignettes to highlight certain Marine attributes. Craige uses the ad hoc and polyglot body of Marines on the frigate *Bonhomme Richard* (1779), for example, to highlight a tradition of fighting prowess. His writing also reflects contemporary developments in the Marine Corps since Marine Schools recently produced the *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations* and the *Small Wars Manual*. Commodore David Porter and Marine lieutenant John M. Gamble's seizure of an advanced naval base on the Marquesas Islands during the War of 1812, for Craige, illustrates the Corps' nascent but developing amphibious warfare tradition.[38]

Post–World War II to Vietnam

Twenty years and two major wars passed before more single-volume comprehensive Marine Corps histories appeared. World War II, the defense unification fights, and a major ground war in Korea had profound impacts on the Corps' organization, history, and popularity. By fighting in major Pacific campaigns and through slick public relations efforts, the Marine Corps had become a household name in America, the

[34] John H. Craige biographical file, MCHD, Quantico, VA.
[35] Capt John H. Craige, *What the Citizen Should Know About the Marines* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1941), 9.
[36] Craige, *What the Citizen Should Know About the Marines*, 66.
[37] Craige, *What the Citizen Should Know About the Marines*, 63.
[38] Craige, *What the Citizen Should Know About the Marines*, 92–93.

subject of movies and pulp fiction alike. Gone, therefore, were the days of writing Marine Corps history to raise Marines from obscurity. The new generation of Marine historians faced different challenges, particularly related to the scope and depth of their projects. The inclusion of two world wars, multiple small wars, Korea, and major twentieth-century organizational changes made fitting it all into a comprehensive narrative a challenge. Thus appeared the first purposefully concise or "compact" histories.

Marine historians produced five such books in the early 1960s, two of which published commercially. The first of these was Philip N. Pierce and Frank O. Hough's *The Compact History of the United States Marine Corps* published by Hawthorn Books in 1960. Pierce and Hough were both Marine World War II veterans with backgrounds in journalism. Pierce majored in journalism at the University of Maine before serving in nine campaigns in World War II and Korea as a Marine officer, receiving over a dozen combat decorations. Hough, the older of the two, enlisted in the Corps in 1917 and fought at Blanc Mont before graduating from Brown University in 1924. He served as public relations officer with the 1st Marine Division in World War II and participated in three major campaigns, including Peleliu.[39]

In their attempt to fit two centuries of Marine history into a 300-page book, the authors devote three chapters to the Corps' early history, roughly 39 pages, which is one-half what Metcalf wrote. Their bibliography and narrative reveal the influence of Collum, Metcalf, and Craige, as they cover much of the same vignettes in similar chronological fashion. Pierce and Hough give 10 November 1775 as the "Present day the Marine Corps celebrates its birthday" but it "sounded a lot more impressive than it proved to be," since "there is nothing to indicate that the two battalions were ever raised."[40] Like previous Marine scholars, Pierce and Hough favor events that highlight Marine contributions to the war effort. For example, they provide an account of Major Samuel Nicholas's secret mission to transport King Louis XVI's loan of silver specie from Boston to Philadelphia by oxcart in 1781 for the "financial salvation of the destitute country."[41] Even on campaigns that failed, however, like the 1779 Penobscot Expedition or the 1780 defense of Charleston, South Carolina, the authors maintain that Marine competence stood out. They also highlight their naval history and heritage throughout, often explicitly calling the Corps' history in the American Revolution and the Quasi-War with France "essentially that of the Navy."[42] Narrative drives this compact history more than anything else, which makes the book easily accessible for commercial audiences. The authors often omit historical context and provide no notes outside of their bibliography.

In 1962, the U.S. Naval Institute published Lieutenant Colonel Robert Debs Heinl's *Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps 1775–1962*. Heinl holds a distinguished place among the pantheon of the Marine Corps' twentieth-century authors. Born in Washington, DC, in 1916, he earned a bachelor of arts from Yale University in 1937, where he majored in English and minored in history. He spent 26 years as a Marine officer with active service in the Corps' defense and antiaircraft battalions and as a naval gunfire officer during World War II and Korea. Heinl published dozens of articles in the *Marine Corps Gazette* and the Naval Institute's *Proceedings*. Beginning in 1946, he headed the Corps' Historical Section, where he began the research and writing of what became the Corps' official histories of operations during World War II. While there, he became a part of the infamous Chowder Society that promoted the Marine Corps' interests during the post–World War II defense unification fights.[43]

Heinl's history moves through the American Revolution and the War of 1812 quickly, which is un-

[39] Frank O. Hough biographical file, MCHD, Quantico, VA; and Philip Nason Pierce biographical file, MCHD, Quantico, VA.
[40] Philip N. Pierce and Frank O. Hough, *The Compact History of the United States Marine Corps*, 2d ed. (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1964), 18.
[41] Pierce and Hough, *The Compact History of the United States Marine Corps*, 25.
[42] Pierce and Hough, *The Compact History of the United States Marine Corps*, 31, 36.
[43] Robert Debs Heinl biographical file, MCHD, Quantico VA; and Aaron O'Connell, *Underdogs: The Making of the Modern Marine Corps* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 116.

derstandable given the book's coverage of two centuries of institutional development. In 28 pages, Heinl walks readers through the founding of the Continental Marines, their services on shore and afloat, their disbandment after independence, and their reestablishment in 1798. He makes no effort to establish the official birth date of the Marine Corps, stating only that the Continental Congress created the Continental Marines on 10 November 1775 and that the U.S. Congress established the Marine Corps in 1798. He credits the House Naval Committee chairman, Samuel Sewall, for getting the Act for Establishing and Organizing the Marine Corps passed on 11 July 1798 and suggests that Sewall "might well be called its father."[44]

Like Pierce and Hough, the standout feature of Heinl's history is his narrative skill. He moves from 1775 to 1815 efficiently and concisely while leaving room for bits of historical context. His setting of the scenes surrounding the Barbary Wars and the War of 1812 is by no means in-depth, but they allow him to link the use and development of the Marine Corps to larger historical forces. He also includes the services of the Navy's loblolly boys (or surgeon's assistants, the antecedents of today's corpsmen), who tended to Marines' medical needs on shore and afloat.[45] Unlike Pierce and Hough, however, Heinl employs endnotes and an extensive bibliography. His discussions of the colonial and early national period is brief compared to Metcalf and McClelland. But his scholarly apparatus coupled with his writing abilities made *Soldiers of the Sea* the best and most accessible comprehensive history of the Marine Corps at the time.

By the time Heinl's history published, there existed no "official" one-volume comprehensive history of the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps' Historical Section in the 1950s and 1960s was hard at work producing dual five-volume official histories: *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II* which it completed in 1971, and *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea*, completed in 1972. McClelland's work comes the closest in this regard, but his work on the colonial and early national period was never published. Most of the books discussed in this essay, therefore, reflect the respective authors' personal interpretations, not the official stance of the Marine Corps.[46] In the 1960s, however, the Marine Corps' Historical Branch published several officially approved narratives, both written by Marine officers.[47] The first was Major Norman W. Hicks's *A Brief History of the United States Marine Corps* in 1962, followed by Captain William D. Parker's *A Concise History of the United States Marine Corps* in 1969. The purpose of these "official histories" was to provide approved (by either the chief of the Historical Section or the Commandant of the Marine Corps) brief histories that highlight the development and accomplishments of the Marine Corps. As official Marine Corps histories, their goals were not just to inform, but to use a highly curated version of history that leaned heavily on heritage to inspire and motivate.[48]

Hicks's and Parker's treatment of the Marines of the revolution and early national era, therefore, serve that purpose. Hicks's nine pages on this period are about how the Marines gained laurels in battle and grew their reputation for fighting on land and sea. Parker treats it much the same. The 10 November 1775 resolution to raise two battalions of Marines constitutes the Marine Corps' birthday, as far as he is concerned, and all the engagements from then up to the 1815 Battle of New Orleans serve as plot points demonstrating growing flexibility and fighting prow-

[44] Robert D. Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps, 1775–1962* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1962), 10.
[45] Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea*, 28.

[46] Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea*, xvii; and Metcalf, *A History of the United States Marine Corps*, vii.
[47] The Marine Corps' history office changed names several times since its founding. The Marine Corps Historical Section, founded on 8 September 1919, became the History Division, Personnel Department, on 1 May 1943. It became the Historical Section, Division of Public Information, on 1 November 1946, followed by the Historical Division in June 1948, and the Historical Branch, G-3, on 15 February 1952. Frank O. Hough biographical file.
[48] What Sir Michael Howard defines as *regimental histories*, in "The Use and Abuse of Military History," *Parameters* 11, no. 1 (1981): 10. Omitted here are the Historical Division's especially useful chronologies that it produced during the 1960s and 1970s. The most relevant here is Col William M. Miller and Maj John H. Johnstone, *A Chronology of the United States Marine Corps, 1775–1934* (Washington, DC: Historical Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1965). It is notable that the authors make no claims regarding the Marine Corps' official birthday.

ess on land and sea.[49] Of the two, Parker's work is longer (114 pages with two chapters devoted to the Corps' early history) and more useful for providing historical context and a more extensive list of references. The Vietnam War's influence is evident in Parker's, as well, considering his reference to the conflict in the introduction and his section on small wars between 1798 and 1835 being much more in-depth than Hicks's 1962 work.

The third official history from this period is Colonel Thomas G. Roe, Major Ernest H. Giusti, Major John H. Johnstone, and Benis M. Frank's *A History of Marine Corps Roles and Missions, 1775–1962*. Published by the Marine Corps' Historical Branch in 1962, *Roles and Missions* is about the evolution of how and for what purposes the Navy and U.S. government tasked Marines. Therefore, the authors make no claims regarding the official birthday of the Marine Corps. Their intent is to highlight how Continental Marines came into existence in 1775 with a shipboard mission while their service ashore with the Army developed as a natural consequence of waging a war with significant maritime and land dimensions. The establishment of the Marine Corps in 1798, however, officially set Marines down the path of serving on board war vessels and duty ashore "as the President, at his discretion, shall direct."[50] Therefore, those dates are important to understand the history of the Marine Corps' mission development not just heritage.

Marine Corps History in the Post-Vietnam and Bicentennial Era

By the mid-1970s the United States had withdrawn from South Vietnam and ended the draft. The U.S. military became an all-volunteer force once again, albeit one reeling from the strategic failure of Vietnam and wracked with personnel problems. The Marine Corps fared no better than the other Services. Within this context, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons produced the next one-volume history of the Marine Corps, the first edition of which published in 1974. Like Heinl, Simmons had a background in journalism, having obtained a bachelor's and a master's degree in the discipline from Lehigh University and Ohio State University, respectively. Born in New Jersey in 1921, Simmons served as an active-duty Marine officer from 1942 until 1971, seeing action in World War II, Korea (including the landings at Inchon and the fight at Chosin Reservoir), and Vietnam. While in charge of the Marine Corps Historical Section, he merged it with the Marine Corps Museums to create the Marine Corps History and Museums Division, over which he served as the director, first as a brigadier general from 1971 until 1978, then as a civil servant until retirement in 1996.[51]

Simmons wrote *The United States Marines* originally a part of a London, England, publisher's regimental history series made up of short works about disparate units and regiments throughout history.[52] He added more material in subsequent editions with different publishers, all while keeping a balance between depth and breadth. His second edition takes just under 300 pages to get to 1976 while the third edition takes the narrative to 1998 in only 330 pages. Simmons devotes only 35 pages to the Marine Corps' early years, beginning his narrative in fall 1775 and only giving passing reference to the background histories of Great Britain's Royal Marines.

Simmons omits important context to move the narrative along as efficiently as possible. For example, he mentions the recruiting of Continental Marines in Philadelphia in December 1775 but not how or why they never formed into the two battalions called for in the 10 November resolution. The book's strong suit,

[49] Maj Norman W. Hicks, *A Brief History of the United States Marine Corps*, 3d ed. (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1962), 1–7; and Capt William D. Parker, *A Concise History of the United States Marine Corps, 1775–1969* (Washington, DC: Historical Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1970), 8–11.

[50] Col Thomas G. Roe, Maj Ernest H. Giusti, Maj John H. Johnstone, and Benis M. Frank, *A History of Marine Corps Roles, and Missions, 1775–1962* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1962), 5–7.

[51] He authored hundreds of articles during that time for *Leatherneck*, *Marine Corps Gazette*, and U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*. He also authored several Marine history books and a novel, *Dog Company Six*, about the Korean War. His *The United States Marines: A History*, published by Naval Institute Press, went through several editions between 1974 and 2003. Edwin H. Simmons biographical file, MCHD, Quantico VA.

[52] Edwin H. Simmons, "A History of Marine Corps Histories," *Naval History* 17, no. 1 (February 2003).

therefore, is not scholarly analysis. Rather, the book works as well as any in existence as a useful introduction to Marine Corps history. The same goes for its portions on the American Revolution and early national period. He asserts that 11 July 1798 was the "true birthday of the Marine Corps," which was at variance with the Marine Corps History Division's official stance, made by both McClellan in 1921 and Parker in 1969.[53] This groups Simmons with Metcalf and Heinl in that all three differed from the official interpretation of the history office they led.

While Simmons was the director of Marine Corps History and Museums Division, one of the division's historians, Charles R. Smith, wrote the most substantial and scholarly book on the Corps' early history. *Marines in the Revolution: A History of the Continental Marines in the American Revolution, 1775–1783*, was published during the Marine Corps' bicentennial year, 1975. Smith's official history aimed "to present an objective analysis of individual and collective contributions, the successes and failures of the group as a whole, and the fundamental aspects of modern Marine amphibious doctrine."[54] As a former artilleryman and field historian for the U.S. Army, Smith had a degree of personal separation from the Corps that most Marine historians discussed in this essay lacked. His treatment of the Continental Marines comes across as fair, dispassionate, and thoroughly guided by source material alone.

The book is 14 chapters of narrative and analysis that illuminates much of the finer details glossed over by other Marine historians (except McClellan) that covered the period. He places the creation of the Continental Marines firmly within the context of the planning for a naval expedition against Nova Scotia, which Washington outside of Boston could not support at the time. He refrains from labeling 10 November 1775 the birthday of the Marine Corps, however. Because of the book's scope and research, the author can devote seven and a half pages to Arnold's Lake Champlain expedition, entire chapters to Esek Hopkins's voyage to New Providence, George Washington's Trenton and Princeton campaigns, and the most detailed account of James Willings's marauding down the Mississippi in print. The book really shines with its accounts of the many ships' duels on the high seas. Smith writes a vivid account of the Battle of Flamborough Head between the *Bonhomme Richard* and the HMS *Serapis* (1779), one that shows readers how the ships carefully maneuvered and shattered each other.[55]

Most of the histories discussed above include colorful accounts of how Marines participated in the American Revolution. With Smith's narrative, however, readers gain a sense that Marines indeed played a significant role and were woven into the sinews of the American war effort. Smith's *Marines in the Revolution* is a remarkable piece of scholarship. With his use of various archives, including those in Great Britain, Spain, and France, as well as private and public special collections, Smith's source base is second to none. As of this writing, Smith's work remains the strongest treatment of the subject.[56]

As Smith's book was published in time for the bicentennial, two other authors worked diligently on comprehensive one-volume narrative histories of the Marine Corps. They are J. Robert Moskin's *The U.S. Marine Corps Story*, published originally in 1977, and Allan R. Millett's *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, the first edition of which hit the presses in 1980. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the major works that covered the early history of the Marines were a mix of historical and journalistic disciplines. Metcalf and Smith had academic backgrounds in history, while Heinl and Simmons were Marine historians by trade but journalists in training and education. Moskin, an award-winning journalist, and

[53] Simmons, *The United States Marines: A History*, 21.

[54] Charles R. Smith, *Marines in the Revolution: A History of the Continental Marines in the American Revolution, 1775–1783* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1975), v.

[55] Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 231–41.

[56] His appendices alone are amazing. They include notes, bibliography, four printed journals/diaries of Continental Marines, a printed letter from Samuel Nicholas, advertisements for Marine deserters replete with physical descriptions of each, muster rolls, and biographies of officers. This book, therefore, is not only useful for readers but also for researchers and educators. *Marines in the Revolution* is a major step in the evolution of how authors have approached and written about Marines in the American Revolution and early national period. See also "USMC in the Early Years," *Marine Corps Gazette* 59, no. 5 (May 1975): 4.

Millett, a Marine lieutenant colonel and professor of military history at Ohio State University at the time, continued this trend. While both authors set out to write one large narrative, the major distinctions between the two stemmed in part from the authors' different professional backgrounds and approaches.

Moskin was a 1944 Harvard graduate who studied journalism and was the managing editor of the *Harvard Crimson*. He then served three years in the U.S. Army before earning a master's degree in history from the University of Columbia. As a journalist for *Look* magazine, he covered military operations in Korea and Vietnam, where he developed an affinity for Marines. Impressed by their esprit de corps and combat prowess, he set about writing a history that is "first of all, the story of men in battle—the story of individual courage—of men who risked everything to do what had to be done." It was also in Vietnam where Moskin developed his view on U.S. imperialism, the ugly side of American history, which he believed needed to be told truthfully and "unvarnished."[57]

The U.S. Marine Corps Story is a "fighting story" that links Marines' history with the United States' imperialism. As the country expanded, Marines "evolved into an elite, professional, amphibious corps, defending Americans' interests and projecting power," Moskin writes.[58] Although he asserts that the Marine Corps as we know it did not exist until 11 July 1798, he begins his story in 1775. Moskin's writing focuses on the Continental Navy and Marines while saying little of state and privateer navies. Moskin rates the Continental Marines' performance as "a mixture of heroism and amateurishness."[59] Similarly to the 1962 *Roles and Missions*, Moskin asserts that the Marine Corps that Congress created in 1798 began the gradual evolution into an elite force. Like Metcalf, Moskin argues that Congress did not fund or fill the Corps' ranks appropriately throughout the Quasi-War with France, the Barbary War, or the War of 1812. He uses this point, however, to highlight how small bands of Marines fought with valor anyway, which "showed the new nation that it could fight."[60]

Moskin's narrative is efficient, but his account lacks scholarly rigor. He covers the Marine Corps' early years in 25 pages with only 10 reference notes. The only Marine Corps history he references for this period is M. Almy Aldrich and Collum's 1875 edition of *History of the United States Marine Corps*. He does not reference McClellan, Metcalf, or Heinl until much later in his book. The entirety of part one of the book, which is almost 100 pages, provides only 20 notes. But scholarship was not his goal. Rather, it was to write an exciting and readable story about the Marine Corps. He appears to have succeeded. Former Commandant of the Marine Corps General Wallace M. Greene called it, "The best-written story of the Corps that I have read." Moskin's book impressed General Lewis William Walt with his "thoroughness and accuracy," while even Edwin Simmons wrote that "this book can be begun anywhere, read and enjoyed."[61]

Allan R. Millett's *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* is, to this day, the most effective academic treatment of the Marine Corps' history in a single volume. While researching and writing *Semper Fidelis* in the 1970s, Millett had a foot in both academia and the Marine Corps. He earned a bachelor's degree from DePauw University in 1959 and a doctorate in history from Ohio State in 1966.[62] He joined Ohio State's history department in 1969 and directed 60 doctoral dissertations before retiring in 2005. He also served as an officer in the Marine Corps Reserve until retiring as a colonel in the late 1980s.[63] His education and dual professional career as a scholar/history professor and Marine officer influenced his approach to the subject. *Semper Fidelis* is an organizational history of the Marine Corps that combines what was then the traditional focus on campaigns

[57] J. Moskin Obituary, *New York Times*, 26 March 2019; and J. Robert Moskin, *The U.S. Marine Corps Story*, 3d ed. (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1992), 7.
[58] Moskin, *The U.S. Marine Corps Story*, 24.
[59] Moskin, *The U.S. Marine Corps Story*, 33.
[60] Moskin, *The U.S. Marine Corps Story*, 51.
[61] Advertisement for *The Story of the U.S. Marine Corps* by J. Robert Moskin, *Marine Corps Gazette* 63, no. 12 (December 1979): 66.
[62] His doctoral advisor was Professor Harry L. Coles. After graduate school, Millett was an assistant professor at the University of Missouri, Columbia, before returning to Ohio State in 1969.
[63] "Allan Millett," *Ohio State University Monthly*, June 1983, 9.

and combat operations with the burgeoning "new" military history, also called War and Society, which explored the intersections of war and military institutions with politics and society. Millett frames the Corps' history as one of adaptation and survival. The Marine Corps, he contends, evolved from a simple to a complex institution across four distinct, yet overlapping phases that corresponded to their primary function at the time.[64] Phase one was the "soldiers at sea" or ship's guards era that Millett places between 1775 and 1909.

The two chapters Millett devotes to the American Revolution and the early national period, therefore, are about institutional growth, not Marine myth, valor, or heroics. Regarding the 10 November 1775 resolution that called for the enlistment of men accustomed to life and labor at sea, not only were the two battalions never raised, but those that eventually did enlist were all semiskilled urban laborers and shop keepers who had never sailed.[65] His accounts of Marine actions on land and at sea illustrates how the nature of Marine service during the war precluded the development of any cohesion, esprit de corps, and uniform standards of discipline and training. Millett acknowledges that the Corps' fate was tied with the Continental Navy but that was part of the reason the organization achieved so little during the war. The Continental Navy and Marines were never the main effort, he argues—decentralized state and privateer forces were. The dual 1779 disasters at Penobscot Bay, Nova Scotia, and Charleston, South Carolina, effectively knocked the Continental Navy and Marines out of the war.[66]

When the U.S. Marine Corps came to life officially on 11 July 1798, its fate again was linked with the Navy in terms of deployment and development. This early Marine Corps served well on board the nation's new frigates during the Quasi-War and Barbary Wars but also suffered from disciplinary and recruiting problems and clashes with naval officers over jurisdiction and treatment. Millett uses Captain Thomas Truxton's 1801 spat with Commandant William Ward Burrows over the authority to assign Marine officers to ships as an example of this. Throughout this period, Millett argues that shipboard duty remained Marines' primary function. This linking Marine history and heritage to the Navy was timely considering the years Marines had just spent on the ground in Vietnam working closely with the U.S. Army.

The main difference between *Semper Fidelis* and the books that came before is Millett. Uninterested in heritage, propaganda, or celebrating the Corps' achievements, Millett's research is deeper, and his analysis is more critical. Russell F. Weigley, a well-known military historian at the time and author of *The American Way of War*, called Millett "a well-established, capable military historian, [who] has achieved a final blend of the professional historian's objectivity with a Marine insider's perceptive understanding of the values and problems of the Corps."[67] Millett published the second edition of *Semper Fidelis* in 1991, Moskin's third edition of the *U.S. Marine Corps Story* came out the following year, but a new single-volume narrative history of the Marine Corps would not appear until 2008.

Post–Cold War Marine Corps Histories

The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States and the subsequent two decades of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations in the Middle East coincided with a lull in the production of narrative comprehensive histories of the Marine Corps. The one exception was Merrill L. Bartlett and Jack Sweetman's *Leathernecks: An Illustrated History of the U.S. Marine Corps* (2008), which is one of three fully illustrated coffee-table books that appeared around

[64] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, xiv–xvi.
[65] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 7–8.
[66] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 23.

[67] Russell F. Weigley, review of *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* by Allan R. Millett, *Marine Corps Gazette* 64, no. 11 (November 1980): 106.

the turn of the twenty-first century.[68] *Leathernecks* is a concise narrative history that leverages graphic art and photographs to showcase Marine operational achievements and institutional development from the American Revolution to the Global War on Terrorism. Bartlett and Sweetman, the former a retired Marine officer and Vietnam veteran, the latter a former Army officer turned naval historian, both taught history together at the U.S. Naval Academy in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In terms of narrative detail and analysis the book is like Simmons's work. They contend that Continental Marines, like the Continental Navy, did not achieve any strategic victories, but during the war the nation developed a heritage and tradition of employing Marines with the Navy. They place the official conception of the U.S. Marine Corps on 11 July 1798 which was in line with interpretational trends in Marine Corps histories since the Vietnam War ended.

Bartlett and Sweetman's chapters covering 1798 to 1820 are celebratory and without much critical analysis. During the Barbary Wars, the Marines played a "vital role," and even after the defeat at Bladensburg in 1814, the authors note, "It did not save the national capital, but it saved national honor." During the war of 1812 they had "cemented" their reputation as "first-class fighting men."[69] Although clearly based on both primary and secondary research, the book provides no notes and a limited "Suggestions for Further Reading" section. The book, therefore, is of limited use for researchers or those looking for a more critical approach to Marine Corps history. It is beautifully published, however, and the result is a narrative that is supported by an excellent array of illustrations, particularly the first chapters, which are replete with dynamic Age of Sail paintings.

Going into the third decade of the twenty-first century, some Marine historians still lean on 10 November 1775 as the Corps' point of origin. Major General Jason Q. Bohm's (Ret) *Washington's Marines: The Origins of the Corps and the American Revolution, 1775–1777* claims that 10 November 1775 is the birth of the Continental Marines, which reflects the historical record. He falls back on heritage, however, by claiming that 1775 was when the Corps' history started, making it "older than the nation it serves." Bohm spent more than three decades in the Marine Corps with various combat and command experiences in the 1990s and during the Global War on Terrorism. He wrote *Washington's Marines* to highlight the Continental Marines' contribution to the war effort, particularly during the Trenton and Princeton campaigns, and the Corps' legacy of operating and fighting as members of a Joint force. This is a theme that would undoubtedly interest readers in the wake of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the Marines spent more than two decades conducting Joint operations.[70]

The entwining of history and heritage is alive and well as of 2025. Despite the evolving nature of how historians have addressed and interpreted the Corps' late eighteenth-century beginnings, the Marine Corps still celebrates 10 November as the official birth date. The Marine Corps History Division, like they did in Parker's *A Concise History of the United States Marine Corps, 1775–1969*, continues to toe the line regarding the official birthday. Just in time for the 250th anniversary, the History Division published *Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment*, the latest and most up-to-date one-volume narrative history and the first one since Parker's monograph.

The authors of *Semper Fidelis* assert simply that the Continental Marines came to be in 1775 followed by the U.S. Marine Corps in 1798 without commentary or analysis. They also explain, as Metcalf did in 1939,

[68] The Marine Corps Heritage Foundation's *The Marines*, edited by Edwin H. Simmons and J. Robert Moskin and the Marine Corps Association's *USMC: A Complete History* authored by Col John T. Hoffman, USMCR (Ret) and edited by Beth L. Crumley, were published in 1998 and 2002, respectively. Each book differs in approach, purpose, and organization. *The Marines* is a thematically organized anthology that devotes one chapter, written by Simmons, to the entire span of Marine Corps history. *USMC* is a work of chronology with brief narratives and vignettes interspersed through each chapter. The primary features of each book, however, are their illustrations, which make for two large, beautifully and ornately published works.

[69] Merrill L. Bartlett and Jack Sweetman, *Leathernecks: An Illustrated History of the U.S. Marine Corps* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 39, 53, 55.

[70] Jason Q. Bohm, *Washington's Marines: The Origins of the Corps and the American Revolution, 1775–1777* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2023), 1.

that it was not until Major General Lejeune's *Marine Corps Order No. 47* was issued on 1 November 1921 that Marines chose 10 November 1775.[71] *Semper Fidelis* covers the longest span of time, surpassing any of its predecessors and requiring sacrifices to narrative detail and analysis for breadth. The years between 1775 to 1815, therefore, get a single 32-page chapter that skims the wave tops. The writing team devoted just 10 pages to the American Revolution, just enough space to list Continental Marine activities. However, they omit many details like the controversial Willing expedition on the Mississippi River and withhold comment on the outcome of certain engagements, such as the unsuccessful 1779 Penobscot Bay expedition.[72] Their sections on the Marine Corps' early nineteenth-century operations have more detail on the Barbary Wars and the War of 1812, which includes expeditions in Georgia and Florida, all placed against the backdrop of the ongoing Napoleonic Wars raging on the Atlantic and in Europe.

The History Division's *Semper Fidelis* reveals how the Marine Corps continues to use its past for both historical and heritage purposes. It is a scholarly work produced by professional historians, but it is also a work about the Marine Corps, for the Marine Corps, produced in very close cooperation with the Marine Corps, using Department of the Navy funds. As such, it has both history and heritage functions. On one hand, the book is a narrative meant to educate the public and Marines about the Corps' history. Its other main purpose, however—"to help those just beginning their service to better understand the legacy they are inheriting and bear responsibility for preserving"—is heritage.[73] Some purist academic audiences may not appreciate the book's dual nature, nor its absence of notes, but they are not the target audience.

Conclusion

When the Marine Corps' birthday is, therefore, depends on who one asks and what one reads. Pre-1921 histories suffered from a dearth of citations and the mixing of lore with factual history. During the interwar period, McClellan and Metcalf brought the study of Marine history into the realm of professional scholarship, the former using both heritage and history. Most Marine Corps historians who have published one-volume histories since at least 1939 do not claim 10 November 1775 as the Corps' birthday.

The Marine Corps, however, still does because the date helps tell a story that motivates Marines and inspires the public. Beginning the institution's history in the fall of 1775 ties the Marine Corps' birth broadly with that of the nation it serves, while starting it in the summer of 1798 ties it more narrowly to the birth of the Department of the Navy during the Quasi-War with France, a later and relatively less significant affair. It may be true that the U.S. Marine Corps existed not a moment before 11 July 1798, but many Marines refuse to let the facts get in the way of a good story.

The Marine Corps prides itself on its long history of faithful service during periods of war and peace. Every remarkable story needs a beginning, and that beginning depends on a set of initial conditions. One of those conditions is the kind of story the author or authors set out to tell. For Collum and Aldrich, it was to attract popular attention and rescue the Marine Corps from obscurity. For authors like Moskin, Pierce, Hough, Heinl, and Simmons, who wrote after the Service had won laurels in world wars and cold wars, their task was to capture the Marine Corps' combat history as concisely as possible. Marine historians Millett, Metcalf, and McClellan, however, focused on institutional development and linked the growth of the Service with the expansion of the Navy and America's overseas interests.

The historical record and the evolution of Marine historiography may undermine the 10 November 1775 narrative. Ultimately, however, that does not matter all that much given what the Corps' past is used for. The Marine Corps, as an institution that has faced many threats to its existence, never had the luxury

[71] *Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment*, 14.
[72] *Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment*, 10.
[73] Shawn Callahan, preface to *Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment*, ix.

of using history solely for academic purposes. From the earliest days of Marine Corps historiography, Marine historians used history to educate *and* inspire, to produce scholarship *and* pass along legacies of bravery and faithfulness. They did this to motivate Marines and gain public support. It is difficult, therefore, to completely divorce Marine heritage from history even among the most highly educated and academically inclined Marine historians. Metcalf dedicated his study "to the Marines who have fought their '. . . country's battles on the land as on sea'."[74] Even Millett, probably the most respected scholar in this essay, "most affectionately" dedicated his book to "Marines everywhere past and present."[75] It should perhaps be a maxim among historians that every Marine history is, first and foremost, for Marines.

•1775•

[74] Metcalf, *A History of the United States Marine Corps*, v.
[75] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, xii.