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THE UNITED STATES MARINES IN THE CIVIL WAR

By

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On 20 December 1860, a South Carolina Convention passed the Ordinance of Secession, formally severing the bonds which had joined that state to the Federal Union. Next came the news that Mississippi had seceded, Florida and Alabama followed close on her heels; then Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas departed. Virginia, North Carolina, and the border states were wavering in their loyalty to the Union.

A major problem facing the Buchanan administration was the preserving of order within the Federal City. The Washington Navy Yard was rumored to be the objective of a mob attack. Marines were ordered to patrol the area, but violence never came. Since it also was necessary to keep open the Potomac River, a detachment of 40 Marines was sent on 5 January 1861 to Fort Washington, Maryland, a decaying ruin perched on a bluff opposite Mount Vernon.(1) North of the capital, Baltimore was ablaze with secession, and there marched some 30 Marines to man Fort McHenry until Army troops arrived on the scene.(2) New York also was in turmoil. Late in January, the Marine guard at the Brooklyn Navy Yard was alerted against a possible attack by Southern sympathizers.(3)

While maintaining order in the North, President James Buchanan made a half-hearted attempt to impress but not arouse the people of South Carolina. In December, the Federal garrison had abandoned Fort Moultrie and under cover of darkness crossed the silent waters to isolated Fort Sumter. The problem facing the President was to send reinforcements to Fort Sumter without bringing war. Loaded with artillerymen and supplies, the steamer Star of the West sailed from New York on 7 January 1861. Upon reaching Charleston harbor, her captain discovered that all buoys and channel markers had been removed. A nighttime approach was impossible, a daylight attempt would prove suicidal; so the expedition returned to New York.(4)

In the meantime, the citizens of the cotton states had sprung to arms. Several hundred Alabama militia, led by Florida authorities, marched on the Pensacola Navy Yard, while the commandant hastily mustered his handful of Marines to oppose them. (5) On 16 January 1861, Marine Captain Josiah Watson signed his pledge never to bear arms against the State of Florida and left Pensacola. The yard, impossible to defend, had been surrendered; but nearby Fort Pickens remained in Federal hands. Upon reaching New York, Watson forwarded his parole to Colonel John Harris, Commandant of the Marine Corps, who responded with the acid comment that he was "not aware of the United States being at war with Florida."(6)

Early in April, Marine ships' detachments served in the expedition which successfully reinforced Fort Pickens; but Fort Sumter was doomed. On 12 April, the same day that Federal ships reached Fort Pickens, cannon roared in Charleston harbor. On the following day, while a Union squadron hovered helplessly off Charleston, the besieged garrison surrendered. Within three days, President Abraham Lincoln, called for volunteers; and the American Civil War had begun.

The acrid scent of powder drifted northward to inspire Virginia to cast her lot with the Confederacy. In Washington the Union command made a belated effort to strengthen the defenses of the Norfolk Navy Yard. Colonel Harris was ordered on 19 April to provide 100 Marines for a relief expedition. On the following day, the Pawnee, a chartered steamer, sailed for Norfolk with 50 Marines, howitzers, and ammunition.(7)

On 20 April, Captain Hiram Paulding arrived with authority to abandon the yard if necessary. Since Virginia was mobilizing, there was little else he could do. The Norfolk barracks detachment under Colonel James Edelin, the Marine guards of the Cumberland and Pennsylvania, and the reinforcements which had arrived on board the Pawnee all pitched in to help destroy the valuable installation. Cannon were spiked; ships, among them the Merrimack, were scuttled; and the Marine barracks were burned to the ground. The seamen and Marines withdrew to waiting ships.(8)

The coming of war found Winfield Scott in command of the Federal armies. Scott assigned to General Irving McDowell the task of taking Richmond quickly. Thus, on 16 July 1861, the Union army snaked out of Washington to humble the secessionists.

Included in the Union host was a Marine battalion of 12 officers and 336 enlisted men, led by Major John G. Reynolds. This battalion was assigned as permanent support to Captain Charles Griffin's "West Point Battery," an Army unit which had trained at the military academy. Keeping pace with the mounted artillerymen was a murderous task, but by the 18th the Marines were at Centreville, about 26 miles west of Washington; the Confederate army massed in front of them.

On 21 July, Reynolds and Griffin spearheaded the column which forded Bull Run, reached Sudley Springs, and changed direction--all according to plan. Meanwhile, a secondary attack faltered, serving only to alert the Southerners that the main blow would be delivered elsewhere. As the Union troops swept down on them, the Confederates shifted their strength to meet the threat. Late in the morning, the West Point Battery and its Marine escort hurried through a stand of timber and opened fire. Behind them pressed the 14th New York, while the 27th New York, another militia regiment, deployed to the left.

Resistance stiffened as Southern reinforcements rushed toward the fray. The 27th charged, then paused to reorganize; the Marines moved forward on the right flank with elements of the battered 14th New York. Three times Reynolds' men were on the verge of panic, but on each occasion he brought them back into line. At this point, the Southern defenders had been driven back about a mile and a half from their original positions.

As the Federal drive lost momentum, Griffin's battery and another led by Captain J. B. Ricketts were posted on a nearby hill. Whatever troops could be spared were ordered to support the cannoneers. Marines moved toward the guns as did a detachment of New York Zouaves.. Suddenly, Jeb Stuart's cavalry burst from the woods, riding down the militia and putting to rout the entire support.(9)

All that remained was a hasty retreat to Washington. Reynolds gathered what men he could find; others met him at the Long Bridge (14th Street) over the Potomac. Together they marched to the Marine Barracks to receive blankets and other gear lost or discarded during the battle and retreat.(10)

Along with the remnants of the battered army, a number of Confederate prisoners were in the throng that swept through the capital. Aroused by fantastic tales of atrocities committed on Northern wounded, a mob attacked one group of captives; but Marine bayonets quickly restored order.(11) Shouting insults and throwing stones might ease the hurt; but the fact remained that American volunteers had been shamefully mauled. The army needed a thorough reorganization, and it needed it quickly.

While the Army drilled, marched, and countermarched, the Navy attempted to bring some degree of order to peninsular Maryland. On 19 August, some 200 Marines were assigned to the Potomac Flotilla to scour the Maryland countryside, paying particular attention to the town of Port Tobacco, in search of Confederate arms.(12)

Meanwhile, at Fortress Monroe at the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, General Benjamin F. Butler was busily organizing an expedition to Hatteras Inlet, North Carolina. Built around the frigate Minnesota, the squadron rounded Hatteras shoals on 28 August. On the following day, the landing got underway in spite of a raging surf; but only a little more than 300 men were ashore before the operation was postponed. The militia, along with Marines from the ships Minnesota, Cumberland, and Wabash, had come to do a job; and they intended to complete it with or without reinforcements. While naval guns lashed its ramparts, the determined Yankees marched toward Fort Clark; but by the time they reached it, the Confederates had withdrawn to Fort Hatteras.

This second fort was a far more impressive work. Nothing could be done during the afternoon, so the Marines and soldiers spent a miserable night huddled together in the rain before the defiant redoubt. The following morning, a lucky hit on a magazine settled the issue; Fort Hatteras surrendered.(13)

Marines next saw action at Pensacola. On the morning of 14 September, a band of seamen and Marines rowed noiselessly into Pensacola harbor to destroy the schooner Judah, rumored as being fitted out as a privateer. John Smith, a Marine from the Colorado, was first to board the vessel. After a spirited fight, the Judah was captured, set on fire, and cut adrift to sink. While one party was dealing with the privateer, a second group spiked a battery in the harbor.(14)

Even as Butler's handful of men were moving against Hatteras Inlet, Flag Officer Samuel F. DuPont proposed a full-scale amphibious expedition against Port Royal, South Carolina, adjacent to Parris Island. In charge of the Marine contingent was Major Reynolds, the veteran of Bull Run, who was drilling an amphibious battalion to serve with the fleet. By the end of October 1861, the expedition was underway.(15)

Reynolds marched his battalion aboard the chartered side-wheeler Governor. On 31 October, a gale lashed the Federal armada. Battered by the raging seas and endangered by clumsy handling, the Governor was on the point of foundering. Reynolds formed his men into damage control parties to shore up sagging bulkheads and bail out flooded compartments. On Saturday, 2 November, the Governor wallowed helplessly in the snarling seas.

That afternoon, the Sabine came alongside the leaking hulk. Lines were rigged, the Marines formed on the deck, and one by one, they were taken from the doomed vessel. As the winds grew more furious, the lines parted. Reynolds marched his men to the rail where they waited tensely until the two ships lurched together. Then, a few at a time, they jumped to safety. It was a slow and dangerous job, but miraculously the Governor stayed afloat until the following morning. Thanks to their superb discipline, only seven Marines were lost.(16)

While the Sabine was returning from her rescue mission, DuPont on 7 November began his assault. Although the battalion was not present, Marines did take part in the operation; for after the Confederates withdrew from Hilton Head, a detachment from the Wabash landed to occupy Fort Walker.(17)

On the same day that Hilton Head was occupied, a band of Marines led by a sergeant joined the bluejackets of the frigate Santee in an attempt to cross Galveston Bar in Texas and destroy the Confederate steamer General Rusk. When opposition developed Navy Lieutenant James E. Jouett, in charge of the operation, realizing that his men could not overpower the Texas seamen, led the Yankees aboard the schooner Royal Yacht which was anchored

nearby. He set fire to the schooner and escaped with his men in small boats. Eight of the Union raiders were wounded, one fatally.(18)

Again the next day, Marines were in action, this time on the gray waters of the Atlantic. The British ship Trent, carrying the Confederate diplomats John Slidell and James Mason, was halted by the American steamer San Jacinto. Marines and seamen boarded the English vessel and carried off the Southerners.(19)

Although eclipsed for a time by the spectacular "Trent Affair," the blockade was slowly but surely sealing off the Confederate coast. On 12 December 1861, Marines from the Dale boarded the steamer Isaac Smith and started up the Ashepoo River which flows into St. Helena Sound below Charleston. At Mosquito Creek, Navy Lieutenant J. W. Nichelson trained his guns on a house which served as headquarters for Confederate detachments operating in the area. The defenders scattered under the bombardment, and Marines landed to destroy the building. Later that month, the Dale's Marines tangled with Southerners in a brief skirmish on the South Edisto River in South Carolina; and in January, of the following year, Leathernecks from the Hatteras burned Confederate stores at Cedar Key, Florida.(20)

Forty-five miles northwest of Hatteras Inlet lay Roanoke Island. A blockading fleet based there would dominate both Pamlico Sound to the south and Albemarle Sound to the west. Union General Ambrose Burnside presented a plan to seize Roanoke Island.(21)

Burnside's troops, some ten thousand strong, began landing on 7 February 1862; the following day, the Southern garrison surrendered. The conquest of the island, although supported by naval guns and howitzers, was principally an Army undertaking. (22)

While Burnside was striking at North Carolina and General George B. McClellan was planning another drive on Richmond, this one by way of the York and James Rivers, the Confederates were hard at work on the Merrimack which was being sheathed in iron. On 8 March 1862, the Merrimack, or Virginia as she now was called, came down the Elizabeth River into the waters of Hampton Roads. At 1410 the Virginia raked the Union Congress with grapeshot, lumbered past her, and turned on the frigate Cumberland, which boasted the most powerful guns in the Federal squadron. For a time it seemed as though the Cumberland would prevail. Her first salvo crashed through open gunports, disabling two cannon and killing 19 Confederate seamen. The Virginia replied, pumping round shot and screaming grape through the Yankee's gun deck. Nine Marines were cut down by this terrible fusillade, but Lieutenant Charles Heywood (later ninth Commandant of the Marine Corps) kept the survivors at their guns. Next the Virginia plunged her iron ram into the Cumberland's vitals, sealing the doom of the wooden vessel.

The Virginia and her escorts now were free to deal with the Congress. At about 1630, her decks littered with the bodies of her gallant sailors and Marines, Congress surrendered. Since the falling tide might at any moment leave the Virginia stranded in the mud, Captain Franklin Buchanan ordered the ship back to Norfolk.

During the course of the battle, other Union frigates attempted to encircle the ironclad. High winds, however, had made navigation extremely difficult, and all three ran aground. One of them, the Minnesota, was stuck fast beyond the range of shore artillery, an easy victim should the Virginia return.

On the following morning, the Virginia did return, but in the meantime, the iron Monitor had arrived on the scene. Although the Union ironclad bore the brunt of the day's fighting, the seamen and Marines aboard the Minnesota had some uneasy moments.(23)

The first shot fired that morning was aimed at the stranded vessel, but the round fell short. Monitor then entered the fray, and the Virginia was kept too busy parrying and thrusting to press home the attack. When the Federal ironclad at last withdrew into shallow water to bring up ammunition from her lockers, the Confederate again bore down on the Minnesota. The two vessels exchanged shots; then the frigate unleashed a broadside which would have demolished any wooden ship, but it did not slow the mighty Virginia. Fortunately, the Monitor chose this moment to return to action; and when the Confederate ironclad at last withdrew, the Minnesota was still intact.

The success of the Monitor enabled General McClellan to launch his drive on Richmond. His advance, slow as it was, rendered Norfolk untenable; and it was abandoned to the Union Army. On 23 May 1862, two weeks after the yard had been recaptured, Captain Charles McCawley (later eighth Commandant of the Marine Corps) was ordered to march his Marines into the devastated installation.(24)

On 11 May, the day after the Virginia was burned by Confederates to prevent her capture by Union forces, the Monitor joined the armored Galena and several other Union vessels in a dash up the James River toward Richmond. At Drewry's Bluff, only eight miles below its objective, the squadron was halted by underwater obstructions and taken under fire by shore batteries. Hit three times, the Monitor drifted downstream, leaving the Galena to silence the Confederate guns. She was returning their fire when a shell struck a powder monkey setting off the round which he held in his arms. Marine Corporal John Mackie rallied the dazed survivors, carried off the dead and wounded, and got three of the Galena's guns back in action. Decorated by President Lincoln for his heroism, Mackie was the first Marine to receive the Medal of Honor.(25)

Although McClellan's thrust was fought to a standstill, Federal forces were enjoying remarkable success elsewhere. DuPont's squadron was striking at will along the Florida coast. Reynold's Marine battalion remained ready, but DuPont found little chance to employ it except to garrison St. Augustine. Unwilling to allow such an excellent organization to deteriorate from inactivity, on 25 March he released the unit from his squadron.(26) Organized for amphibious operations, the Marine battalion was not suited to garrison duty.

After the inspiring capture of Port Royal the previous winter, the Union high command began looking around for a naval officer to lead an attack upon New Orleans. The man selected was a crusty veteran of the War of 1812, Captain David G. Farragut.

At 0200 on the morning of 24 April 1862, Farragut's wooden vessels began their dash past powerful Forts Jackson and St. Philip. The Varuna, swiftest unit of the attacking flotilla, gradually drew ahead of her sisters. Suddenly, a group of Southern gunboats came out of the darkness. One of them, the Morgan, rammed the Federal ship. The Varuna's Marines opened fire, driving the Morgan's gunners from their posts. The Federal skipper managed to beach his ship on a sandbar, while the Confederate drifted downstream out of control.(27)

USS Iroquois followed Farragut's first division through the gantlet. She too was attacked by gunboats. During the night's encounter, the Marine guard of the Iroquois suffered 2 killed and 24 wounded.(28)

Once his flotilla had run the batteries, all that remained for Farragut was to occupy the city of New Orleans. On the morning of 24 April, Farragut anchored off the city and ordered Marine Captain John L. Broome to unfurl the United States flag over the quarantine buildings. Supported by a pair of Navy howitzers, the Marines then took possession of the Customs House. While a mob raged, boiled, and shouted insults, a Marine guard kept order as the state banner was cut down and replaced with Old Glory. On 1 May, when Butler's men marched into New Orleans, the last of the Marines were withdrawn.(29)

After the capture of New Orleans, Union activities along the Mississippi River increased in tempo. Cairo, Illinois, became the home of the river gunboats; and a Marine detachment was ordered there late in 1862. When the base, in the spring of 1864, was moved to Mound City, Illinois, the Marines went with it.(30)

To assist the gunboat flotilla, a Marine brigade was recruited from among the boatmen of the Mississippi Valley. This unit was under control of the Army and had no kinship with the United States Marine Corps.(31) Leathernecks, however, did aid in clearing the Confederates from the banks of the Mississippi.

There were, for example, regular Marine detachments on some of the larger river vessels.(32) Also, on 15 March 1863, when Admiral Farragut ran the batteries at Port Hudson, Louisiana, Marines manned his secondary guns. The detachment on the USS Richmond suffered two killed and eight wounded in this engagement when a Confederate shell exploded against a gun carriage. (33)

Late in 1862, a battalion of about 140 Marines was formed for duty at the new Navy Yard at Vallejo, California. Commanded by Major Addison Garland, the detachment sailed from New York on board the Ariel, one of Cornelius Vanderbilt's gold-carrying ships. On this voyage, the lightly armed vessel carried no bullion, only Marines and civilian passengers. Off the coast of Cuba, the Confederate raider Alabama swept down on the steamer. The Ariel's captain called for more speed; but as she drew away, the Alabama fired a warning shot. The Ariel decided not to resist. After solemnly pledging not to bear arms against the Confederacy, the Marines were released. The battalion landed at Aspinwall, Colombia, crossed the isthmus, and eventually reached its destination.(34)

The Confederate Navy remained full of fight. On the morning of 31 January 1863, in Charleston harbor, two ironclad Confederate rams eased into the main ship channel and crept slowly toward the anchored vessels of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron. One ram attacked the Mercedita, which surrendered. The second ram attacked the Keystone State, leaving her dead in the water. Twenty of the crew were killed, eight of them Marines.(35) Charleston definitely was a thorn in the Union side.

In August of 1863, the North's new iron ships returned to support landings on Morris Island, at the mouth of Charleston harbor. The operation was a partial success, most of the island was overrun, but the Federal column ground to a halt before the walls of Fort Wagner. It's ranks badly depleted, the assault force finally appealed to the Navy for help. A Marine battalion, under the command of Major Jacob W. Zeilin (later seventh Commandant of the Marine Corps), was formed at Port Royal and rushed to the scene.

Before the end of the month, the plan of battle had been changed. Since Fort Wagner already had taken a severe pounding from naval guns, Rear Admiral John A. Dahlgren decided to employ the Marines in an assault upon Fort Sumter. When the Admiral called upon Major Zeilin for "one to two hundred resolute men," the Marine officer, offered "150 men."(36)

On 8 September, one day after Federal troops had entered Fort Wagner, the attack on Fort Sumter was launched. In the meantime, Major Zeilin had been replaced by Captain E. McDonald Reynolds, who organized three companies to participate in the operation. Packed into small boats, the seamen and Marines were taken in tow by tugs.

Success depended upon surprise and coordination; unfortunately, the naval expedition enjoyed neither. One string of a dozen boats went astray. Thinking the expedition had been called off, Lieutenant John C. Harris reported for further orders to the nearest Union warship. By the time he had got the men back into their boats and on the way toward Sumter, it was too late.

Captain Charles G. McCawley, who led the battalion in its assault, found it impossible to keep his boats together. So impenetrable was the night that he could not tell for certain whether any of his men had reached the objective. Actually a band of 20 Marines led by Lieutenant Percival C. Pope succeeded in landing, but Confederate riflemen drove them back. When the expedition at last was recalled, most of the men still were in their boats, milling around near the base of Sumter's battlements.(37)

In March 1863, the United States Congress enacted a draft law. On 13 July 1863, shortly after drawings began at the New York City headquarters, a mob burst into the building. To help restore order, a naval brigade marched out of the New York shipyard. Included in this force were some 180 Marines commanded by Captain John C. Grayson.(38)

The year 1864 began auspiciously enough, for on 1 January, Lieutenant Louis E. Fagan led a small detachment ashore at Murrell's Inlet near Charleston. Forty seamen with two light howitzers joined Fagan's 30 Marines in rowing to the inlet. They mounted the guns on a sandspit and fired five shells into a Confederate schooner. The last round touched off a cargo of turpentine; greasy smoke rolled over the mudflats as the vessel burned to the ground.(39)

In spite of the ease with which Union raiding parties struck along the Carolina coast, the Confederacy was far from feeble. Among the weapons unleashed against the Federal blockade were the mine and the spar torpedo. On the evening of 18 April, a lookout aboard the Wabash sighted a boat headed directly toward him. At first he thought it was a submarine like the one which had destroyed the Housatonic some months before. The call to general quarters shattered the quiet of the night. As the ship slipped her cable and got underway, her Marine detachment leaped to the rail and blazed away at the attacking craft. The torpedo boat was only 40 yards distant when a round shot crashed into the water beside it. In the twinkling of an eye, it disappeared beneath the boiling waters. Whether the fragile craft was holed by Marine musket fire or swamped by the shot could not be determined. In either case, the Wabash was saved.(40)

From an administrative standpoint, the Marine Corps, like the other services, began the war with a great number of older officers in responsible positions. In order to weed out those too old for active service, Congress in 1862 passed a retirement act which permitted the Secretary of the Navy, with the consent of the President, to retire those veteran Naval officers whom he judged unfit. With the death of Colonel John Harris on 2 May 1864, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles faced the task of selecting a new Commandant. The logical choice would have been Lieutenant Colonel John G. Reynolds, but Harris had ordered him tried by court martial on a rather insignificant charge. To avoid the controversy which would occur whether Reynolds were selected or passed over and retained, Secretary Welles chose the man he wanted and then invoked the law of 1862 to retire all officers senior to his choice. On 9 June 1864, Jacob Zeilin, a company commander in Reynolds' battalion at Bull Run, was appointed Commandant.(41)

No sooner had he taken office than news of an inspiring victory electrified the North. The commerce raider Alabama had been sunk. For months the USS Kearsarge had been scouring the sealanes in search of Confederate raiders. Upon learning that the Alabama had anchored at Cherbourg, the Kearsarge took up station outside the harbor. On Sunday, 19 June 1864 the Alabama unleashed her first broadside at 1050. Her guns had the greater range, but inaccurate shooting offset this advantage. Firing slowly but with devastating effect, the Kearsarge followed her adversary through a series of graceful turns. The Kearsarge Marines sweated at their rifled cannon as the Union vessel pounced on the crippled raider. One last terrible broadside scourged the Alabama, then a white flag appeared. The dread commerce destroyer was sinking fast.(42)

In the spring of 1864, General Ulysses S. Grant arrived at Washington from the West. At his coming, the Army of the Potomac took the offensive, never again to relinquish it. While a Union army stood guard near Harper's Ferry to protect Washington, Grant started after the Army of Northern Virginia. Several times Grant was halted, but always he kept up the kind of unremitting pressure which sooner or later would wear down the troops of Robert E. Lee. There was, however, a means of thwarting the dogged Grant. A quick thrust at Washington might cause panic, forcing Grant to divert men northward. The Union commander realized the danger, and he had instructed the force at Harper's Ferry to drive through the Shenandoah Valley; but the offensive miscarried. Union forces were halted, then pulled back into West Virginia. The gateway to Washington now lay open.

The Confederate commander in the Shenandoah Valley was Jubal A. Early, a hard driving soldier who knew a golden opportunity when he saw one. Early's troops swept into Maryland, scattered an army drawn up along the Monocacy River, and marched on the capital. His thrust was halted at Fort Stevens, well within the District of Columbia, when reinforcements from Grant's army filed into the Union trenches. On the night of 12 July, Early ordered a withdrawal.(43)

In the meantime, Confederate cavalry was hacking at the lines of communication between Washington and the North. On 11 July, horsemen charged the handful of troops guarding the railroad bridge over the Gunpowder River, a vital artery linking Baltimore with Havre de Grace, Maryland. The Confederates sent a string of burning freight cars hurtling down the rails onto the wooden bridge. The structure was badly damaged before the blaze could be brought under control.(44)

On that same day, Captain James Forney and his company of Marines--a part of a naval brigade formed at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, arrived at Havre de Grace. While protecting working parties, Forney's Marines helped repel a second attack on the Gunpowder River bridge. By 18 July, the tracks were almost completely repaired. Since the cavalry detachments had rejoined Early's retreating army, the Marines were ordered back to Philadelphia.(45)

The war was not going well for the Confederacy. Grant's drive might be stalled, but he could not be routed. William T. Sherman was drawing closer to Atlanta, advancing by a series of dazzling if time consuming marches. Yet, the crushing of the Confederacy was taking time, too much time and far too many lives. The North was growing weary; a victory was needed to restore confidence in Union arms. Once again, it was David Farragut who won that victory.

On the morning of 5 August 1864, Farragut's ships raced past Fort Morgan, plowed through torpedo fields, and entered Mobile Bay. Beyond the harbor defenses lay the ironclad ram Tennessee and a cluster of Confederate gunboats. The Lackawanna rammed the ironclad. Spun around by the impact the Union vessel drifted alongside her opponent. For a few violent moments the two ships lay head to stern, and U. S. Marines fired their muskets into the Tennessee's open gunports. Throughout the battle, Farragut's Marines fought gallantly. Aboard the flagship Hartford, two after guns were manned by Marines. Under the inspiring leadership of Captain Charles Heywood, these men kept up a deadly fire. Marine gun crews also distinguished themselves aboard the Brooklyn and Richmond.(46)

By November 1864, General William T. Sherman was preparing to drive from Atlanta toward Savannah. To interrupt the flow of supplies from Virginia to the south, a Marine battalion under Lieutenant George G. Stoddard joined Army troops in an attempt to sever the Charleston and Savannah rail line. At dawn on 29 November, the expedition landed at Boyd's Neck, South Carolina. For two days the Union column plodded steadily forward, encountering only an occasional picket line; but at Honey Hill the Confederates made a determined stand. The Marines slogged through a swamp, aligned their ranks, and marched onto the firing line. In the face of heavy fire, they held their ground until midafternoon. Advance was impossible; and when the Union line began to waver, the Marines were recalled.

On 6 December another try was made. This time, the Federal troops reached the vicinity of Tullifinney Cross Roads, about one mile from the railroad, when they again were beaten back by entrenched Confederates. The naval brigade retired a short distance to throw up earthworks. After this second repulse, the plan to tear up the rails was abandoned. Instead, the seamen, Marines, and infantrymen were to attack, while the artillerymen cleared lanes of fire through which to shell the tracks.

At dawn on the ninth, the Marines deployed in a skirmish line, waited for a preliminary bombardment by the artillery, then swept forward. Wading through the waist-deep ooze, pushing aside a dense curtain of underbrush, the men of the naval brigade advanced to within 50 yards of the main works. Wet, mud-smeared, and weary, the Federal troops stumbled out of the marsh to blaze away at the Confederate position. As soon as the artillery was ready to blast the railway, the troops began retiring. In the confusion of pulling back, no one told the Marines to withdraw. Before Lieutenant Stoddard realized what had happened, Southerners were leaping from their trenches to cut off his unit. He led his men into the fastness of the swamp, eluded his pursuers, and struck out for the Tullifinney River. Hugging the banks of the stream, the Marines slipped past a Confederate patrol and reached friendly lines. Late in December, heavy rains put an end to the operation.(47)

With Union forces in Mobile, Charleston, New Orleans, and Savannah, only one major port remained open to Confederate blockade runners by December 1864. This was Wilmington, North Carolina, guarded by powerful Fort Fisher. To sever this last artery, General Ben Butler devised a truly spectacular plan for destroying the fort by blowing it to atoms. This failed, and Butler withdrew.(48)

Even as the attack was called off, Admiral David D. Porter was laying plans for a second effort. General Grant selected Major General Alfred H. Terry to lead the second expedition. Porter was to provide gunfire support, while Terry's men landed and stormed the walls. By 14 January 1865, Union troops were ashore poised for the final assault.

Although Terry had not requested any assistance from the Navy, except, of course, for gunfire, Admiral Porter became obsessed with the notion that the army should be reinforced. He decided to employ his naval brigade, a large landing force which he had assembled less than two weeks before. This brigade was made up of about 1600 seamen, most of them armed with cutlass or pistol, and some 400 Marines who carried rifles or carbines. According to Porter's plan, at the moment of the Army assault the Marine riflemen were to seize the parapet and pick off the Confederates within the fort. Then the seamen would rush past the Marines to charge the Southern cannoneers.

On the afternoon of 14 January, the brigade went ashore. Navy Captain K. Randolph Breese, in command of the unit, modified Porter's plan only slightly. Instead of scaling the walls, the Marines were to prepare rifle pits from which they could support the advance. The seamen, however, still faced the grim prospect of running across the open beach to clamber up the walls and close with the enemy.(49) This alone was enough to render the plan suicidal. A rifle could kill a person at ranges up to half a mile; at 250 yards it was a murderous weapon. Thus, it was possible for the Marines to knock a man from the parapet, but only if the man were fool enough to expose himself. No Confederate trooper would take such an unnecessary risk. While the Marines were sniping at the protected Southerners, these in turn would be firing upon the bluejackets moving en masse across open terrain.(50) In short, there was very little chance of success.

The following day, Captain Breese sent two detachments of Marines, one commanded by Lieutenant Louis E. Fagan, the other by Captain Lucien L. Dawson, into the rifle pits. He then tried to form the seamen into three assault waves to attack through the Marines. Somehow his orders went astray, and the bluejackets formed to the left of the Marines. Further to complicate matters, Breese could not find out exactly when the Army intended to attack. The final misfortune came when Dawson received a garbled order to join in the assault. He complied by pulling his men out of their trenches, marching off to the left, and mingling them with the seamen. Instead of moving directly toward Fort Fisher, the column marched almost parallel to the face of the fortification before it wheeled and charged. In the meantime, Lieutenant Fagan's men were supporting the attack as best they could, but they could not cope with the 800 Confederates who manned the ramparts. Both the seamen and Marines displayed great gallantry, some of them almost reached the wall; but courage was not enough. The attack was easily broken. As the naval brigade stalled, the Army launched its assault, succeeded in obtaining a foothold within the bastion, and finally carried the day. Porter's men had provided a helpful but a costly diversion.(51)

The fall of Fort Fisher sealed off the Confederacy. Lee would hold his army together for almost another three months, but the success of the blockade made his defeat inevitable.

The main contribution of the Marines during the Civil War was their service as members of gun crews aboard ships of the blockading squadron and Mississippi flotilla. Except for Major John G. Reynolds seaborne battalion, specifically organized for service with the fleet, there was no permanently constituted force so trained and equipped. Although Reynold's command was never employed in any major operation, amphibious or otherwise, its concept and organization pointed the way to the eventual formation in 1933 of a Fleet Marine Force trained and equipped to operate with the fleet of which it is an integral component. Although comparatively few in number, only 64 officers and 3,075 enlisted in 1864, the Marine Corps played an important, if minor role, in the Union victory.(52)

NOTES

(1) Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894-1922), Series I, v. 4, pp. 409-415. Cited herein as Navy Records.

(2) Ibid., pp. 263-264.

(3) Contemporary accounts, in contrast to later histories, indicate that no Marines took part in the expedition.

(4) Richard S. Collum, History of the United States Marine Corps (New York: C. R. Hamersly Company, 1903), p. 116.

(5) National Intelligencer, Washington, D. C., 24 Jan 1861 in Subject File "Chronology, 1861," Archives, HQMC.

(6) Navy Records, I, 4, p. 73.

(7) Ibid., pp. 283-285.

(8) Clyde H. Metcalf, A History of the United States Marine Corps (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), p. 197; Clarence E. Macartney, Mr. Lincoln's Admirals (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1956), pp. 174-175.

(9) Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies in the War of the Rebellion (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, v. 2, pp. 383-385. Cited herein as Army Records. Fairfax Downey, Sound of the Guns (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1955), pp. 125-128; John W. Thomason, Jr., Jeb Stuart (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 112; Navy Records, I, 4, pp. 579-581.

(10) Navy Records, I, 4, p. 579.

(11) Margaret Leech, Reveille in Washington (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1941), p. 107.

(12) Navy Records, I, 4, p. 625ff.

(13) Metcalf, op. cit., p. 199; James M. Merrill, The Rebel Shore (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1957), pp. 19-25.

(14) Collum, op. cit., p. 122.

(15) Merrill, op. cit., pp. 28-33.

(16) John H. Magruder, III, "The Wreck of the Governor," Leatherneck, v. 38, no. 11 (Nov 1955), p. 74.

(17) Robert D. Heinl, "Hilton Head and Port Royal, 1861," Marine Corps Gazette, v. 25, no. 1 (Mar 1941), p. 24.

(18) Collum, op. cit., p. 124.

(19) Ibid., p. 130.

(20) Ibid., pp. 131-132.

(21) Merrill, op. cit., pp. 81-86.

(22) Collum, op. cit., pp. 134-135; Richard A. Ward, "An Amphibious Primer: Battle for New Bern," Marine Corps Gazette, v. 36, no. 8 (Aug 1952), p. 36; Robert W. Daley, "Burnside's Amphibious Division," Marine Corps Gazette, v. 35, no. 12 (Dec 1951), p. 30.

(23) William C. and Ruth White, Tin Can on a Shingle (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1957), pp. 69-70, 99-101; Metcalf, op. cit., pp. 205-206; Navy Records, I, 7, pp. 22-23.

(24) Navy Records, I, 7, p. 422.

(25) Frank H. Rentfrow, "On to Richmond," Leatherneck, v. 22, no. 1 (Jan 1939), pp. 10-11.

(26) Navy Records, I, 12, pp. 657-659.

(27) Navy Records, I, 18, pp. 210-211; Edwin N. McClellan, "The Capture of New Orleans," Marine Corps Gazette, v. 5, no. 4 (Dec 1920), pp. 361-363.

(28) Navy Records, I, 18, pp. 210-211.

(29) Ibid., pp. 236-237; McClellan, op. cit.

(30) Metcalf, op. cit., p. 218.

(31) Fletcher Pratt, Civil War on Western Waters (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1956), p. 161.

(32) Metcalf, op. cit., p. 210.

(33) Navy Records, I, 19, pp. 675-676.

(34) Metcalf, op. cit., p. 217; Edward Boykin, Ghost Ship of the Confederacy (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1957), pp. 255-259.

(35) Navy Records, I, 13, pp. 579-583.

(36) Ibid., I, 14, p. 518.

(37) Ibid., p. 622-625; Metcalf, op. cit., pp. 208-209.

(38) Elbridge Colby, "Draft Riots," Dictionary of American History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), v. 11, p. 65; Metcalf, op. cit., pp. 218-219.

(39) Navy Records, I, 15, pp. 156-157.

(40) Ibid., p. 405.

(41) Metcalf, op. cit., p. 219.

(42) Boykin, op. cit., pp. 356-384; Macartney, op. cit., pp. 223-232.

(43) Bruce Catton, A Stillness at Appomattox (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1953), pp. 256-266; Army Records, I, 37 part 1, pp. 347-349.

(44) Army Records, I, 37 part 1, pp. 224-230.

(45) Metcalf, op. cit., p. 211; "James Forney," Biography File, Archives, HQMC.

(46) Navy Records, I, 21, pp. 425-428, 448, 462, 465-470.

(47) Ibid., I, 16, pp. 98-111.

(48) Merrill, op. cit., pp. 222-224.

(49) Navy Records, I, 11, p. 430.

(50) Bruce Catton, Mr. Lincoln's Army (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1953), pp. 191-192.

(51) Navy Records, I, 11, pp. 446, 577-578.

(52) "Strength and Distribution, 1798-1941," Subject File, Archives, HQMC.