The Corps' Salty Seadogs Have All But Come Ashore

Seagoing Traditions Founder As New Millennium Approaches

Story by Herb Richardson and R. R. Keene

Detachments of Marines have served aboard American naval vessels since the beginning of the Continental Marine Corps in 1775. That stretch of more than two centuries ended last May when officials at Marine Headquarters in Washington, D.C., opted to scuttle the detachments to free more Marines for Fleet Marine Force duty.

Although the death knell sounded in 1998, the trend toward reduction of the number of seagoing Marines was noted decades before that time.

For instance, the 1967 edition of "The Marine Officer's Guide" explained to young officers, "Since World War II and the Korean War, and even more today, the great permanent expansion of the Marine Corps has unfortunately been accompanied by a corresponding reduction in the number of ships of the Navy carrying Marine detachments, with the result that sea duty is a much rarer tour for the young officer than in the past."

How deep is the tradition of seagoing Marines?

It goes right into the heart of the Corps—to the reason the organization was born—to its oldest and original duty.

The concept of marines goes far back into naval history. A study of warships over the past 2,500 years will almost always turn up marines of some form or fashion. The ancient Greeks were known to put 20 to 30 dedicated archers on their war vessels.

American Marines don't go quite that far back. They arrived on the scene, albeit as English colonists, in 1740, first commanded by Alexander Spotswood, the governor of the colony of Virginia. He didn't get to do battle with the four battalions raised to face the Spaniards in the War of Austrian Succession. Spotswood died shortly after assuming command.

But the Marines did fight here and there in the continent's formative years and soon became fixtures on the war ves-

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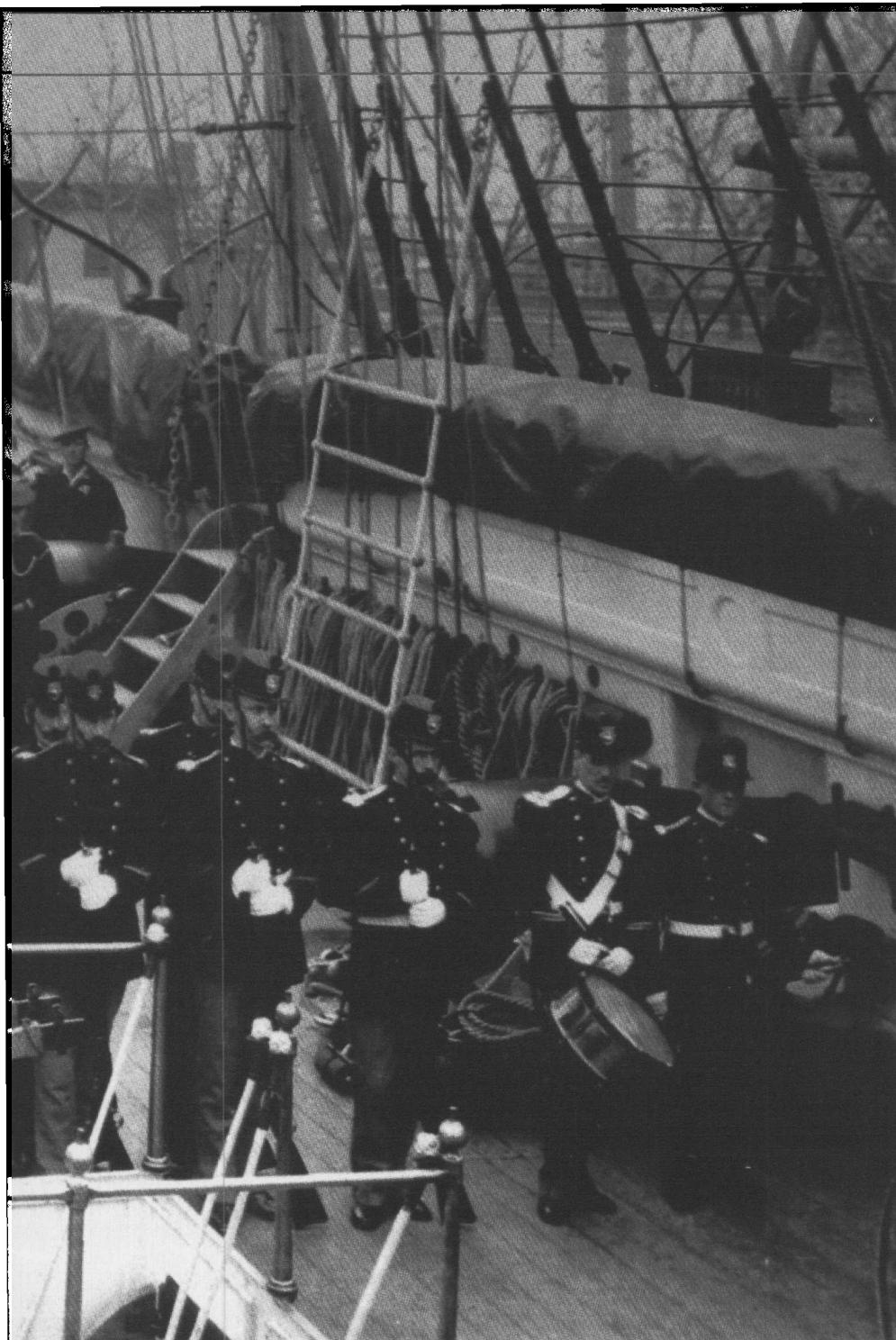
In 1880, sail-powered warships such as USS *Enterprise* were already on their way out, but the Marine detachments were still vital to defense and discipline at sea.

dotted line for six and two-thirds dollars per month, and every day a ration of a pound each of bread, beef or pork, potatoes or turnips, or a half-pound of peas, and a half-pint of rum.

There was also butter once a week, pudding twice and cheese three times a week. In addition, they were issued green and white uniforms, if the clothing was available.

Inn owner and ace recruiter Samuel Nicholas was commissioned as a captain and charged with taking nearly 300 of the country's new Marines to New Providence Island, in the Bahamas, where it was known the British had large stores of gun powder, arms and ammunition—war staples for which General George Washington had great need.

After a two-week voyage from Maryland, on March 3, 1776, the Marines seized two forts in the face of almost zero-resistance to capture guns, powder (less than anticipated because the governor had slipped most of that valuable commodity out the back door before the invasion), cannon balls, mortars and shells for the latter weapons. Nicholas, the expedition leader, is considered to be the first Commandant of the Marine Corps.

During the attack on the forts the Marines took three rounds of cannon fire that hurt no one.

The return trip was different.

Britain's HMS *Glasgow* turned her 20 guns on the squadron transporting the Marines at Block Island. When the smoke cleared, seven Marines lay dead and four others were wounded. The British ship reported four killed and wounded.

sels of the time. Their duties were to enforce discipline aboard ship, help the sailors going into battle, lead landing and boarding parties, help with the cannon fire and deliver rifle fire from aloft during sea skirmishes.

Then came the American Revolution, the famous Maritime Commission Meetings headed by John Adams at Philadelphia's Tun Tavern and the founding resolution passed by Congress Nov. 10, 1775:

"Resolved, that two Battalions of Marines be raised consisting of one Colonel, two Lieutenant Colonels, two Majors & Officers as usual in other regiments, that they consist of an equal number of privates with other battalions; that particular care be taken that no person be appointed to office or inlisted (sic) into said Battalions, but such are good seamen, or so acquainted with maritime affairs as to be able to serve to advantage by sea, when required."

The passage of that resolution is the now-celebrated birthdate of the United States Marine Corps, then known as the Continental Marines.

Tun Tavern figured prominently in the Marine affairs of the day. The Philadelphia tavern became the Corps' first recruiting headquarters where able-bodied men were lured into signing on the
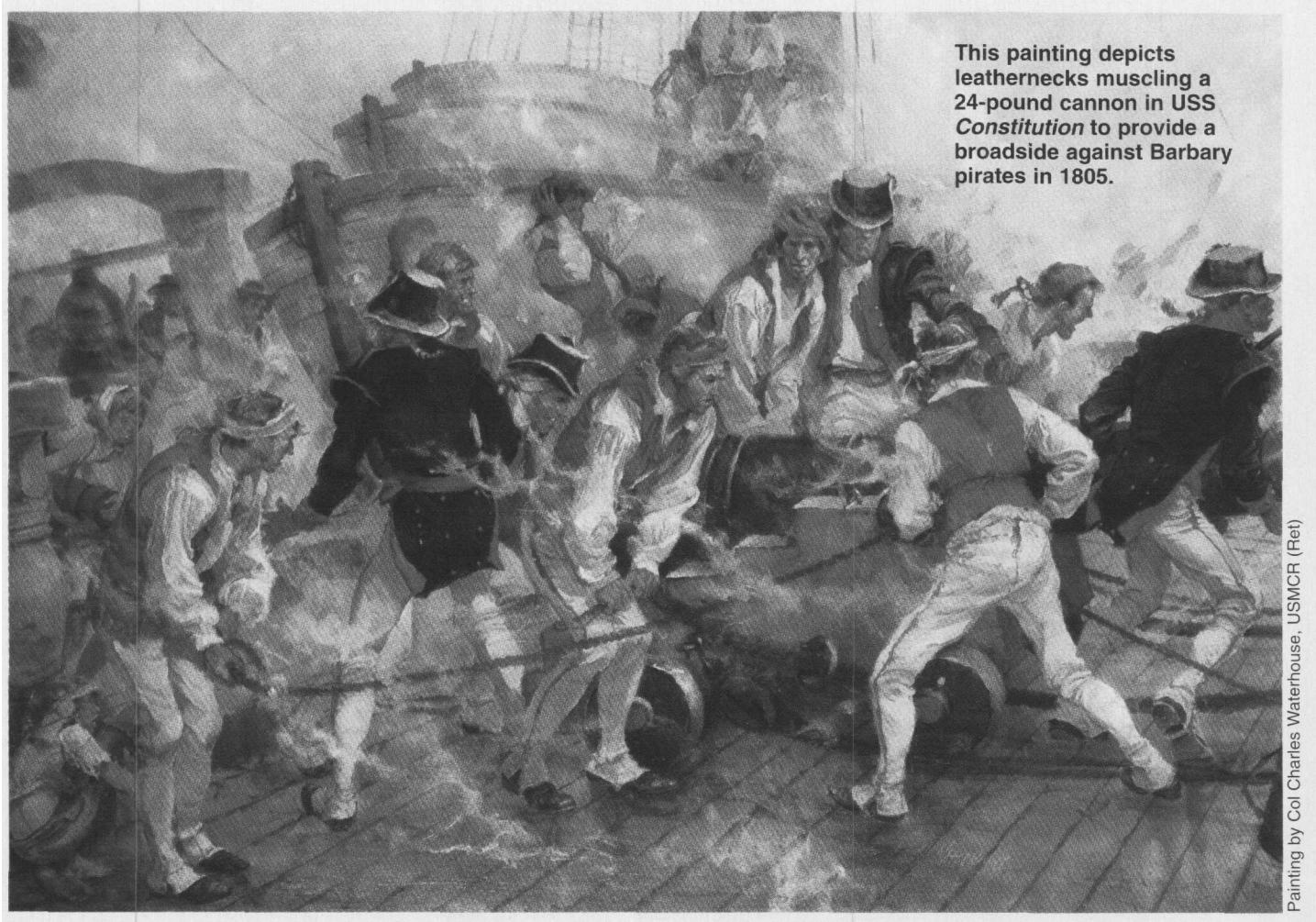
Seagoing Marines were involved in many of the battles of the war for America's independence, sometimes delivering their rifle fire from platforms rigged high over the ships, and sometimes on land—but almost always near the coastal waters of their struggling new country.

When peace came with the Treaty of Versailles, Nov. 30, 1783, the American Navy and the Continental Marines were disbanded. The Marines had grown to 124 officers and 3,000 enlisted men.

The concepts of a national Navy and Marine Corps lay dead in the water until March 1794, when Congress authorized construction of six frigates, all of which were to have Marine detachments.

This buildup was triggered by the habit of sailors from Algiers capturing U.S. vessels and holding them and their crews for ransom. This happened 11 times in 1793. In addition, European powers continued to wage war, and Americans were pressured to break their position of neutrality.

The frigates *United States*, *Constellation* and *Constitution* were launched in 1797, and the Congressional Act of July 1, 1797, followed. The act specified five lieutenants, eight sergeants, eight corporals, three drummers, three fifers and 140 privates to man the ships' detachments of Marines.

The strength of the Corps' seagoing Marines continued to grow.

In 1802 President Thomas Jefferson pulled the plug again. It was considered by some to be a shortsighted attempt to get a handle on the growing national debt. Ships were decommissioned, and some were even dismantled. The Marines suffered, too, with a cutback to 26 officers and 453 men.

But the Marines and sailors had managed to wreak havoc on the French before President Jefferson wielded his budget ax.

The fledgling sea warriors in 1798

"I should deem a man-of-war incomplete without a body of Marines...imbued with that esprit that has so long characterized the 'Old Corps.' "

—Commodore Joshua R. Sands, 1852

turned to the task of driving French cruisers and privateers from America's coast. But the French simply withdrew to various sites in the West Indies, where they could continue to ambush American trade vessels.

This set the scene for several heavy sea duels when the Americans sailed their ships of war into the island waters to stem the predations of the French marauders.

USS *Delaware* was the first American

ship to claim a French prize in early July 1798. The encounter was brief.

The French 40-gun ship *Insurgente* fought a spirited battle Feb. 7, 1799, but was captured by *Constellation*. The same American ship got into a five-hour firefight with the 52-gun frigate *Vengeance* about a year later. The French vessel struck her colors in surrender three times, but the signal was missed in the dark of night. Casualties were heavy on both ships, and both vessels were heavily damaged and barely able to make port.

Lieutenant Bartholomew Clinch commanded the Marine detachment during both battles. His Marines reportedly contributed greatly to the victories and suffered more than their share of casualties.

There were also some landings during this period. Marine Lt James Middleton led a landing party of Marines from *Merrimack* and *Patapsco* to help save the port of Curacao from the invading French.

Other Marines went ashore in support of an operation to seize an English ship being held under heavy cannon cover at Puerto Plata Harbor in Santo Domingo.

As the trouble with France neared a conclusion triggered by dozens of captured and sunken French ships, the mighty frigate *Enterprise*, with a detach-

ment of 16 Marines, began predations of its own. In 1800 the ship's crew captured nine French privateers, took back 11 American vessels and took down a Spanish brig of war after the latter ship sought an encounter.

In the last month of that year the stalwart American ship captured the 10-gun privateer *L'Aigle* and engaged and beat the superior vessel *Flambeau* after a tough fight. Marines and their small-arms fire were credited with a major role in the *Flambeau* battle outcome.

President Jefferson's budget-inspired standdown soon came to an end as countries such as Algiers, Morocco, Tunis and Tripoli extorted a couple million dollars a year, roughly one-fifth of the national income, either as ransom for captured Americans or as tolls to allow American ships to sail the Mediterranean waters.

In 1805, Tripoli's leader declared war on the United States because he didn't think he was getting a full slice of the American pie. The pirates of Tripoli went so far as to capture the frigate *Philadelphia* and imprison the crew that included 44 Marines.

Navy Lt Stephan Decatur and a complement of men that included eight Marines under the command of Sergeant Solomon Wren sailed the captured ketch *Intrepid* into the harbor at Tripoli, boarded *Philadelphia*, overpowered the pirates and burned the ship to the waterline to keep it from being used against the Americans.

One of the most daring, historic feats of this war involved Lt Presley O'Bannon and a few other Marines, who, along with a group of Greeks, Arabs, Turks and an assortment of mercenaries, caravaned 600 miles across the searing heat of the Libyan desert to the harbor fort of Derna. The assault on the fort and nearby castle was envisioned as a joint forces operation. It did not go according to plan, but O'Bannon and his men, including a small English force, assaulted the fort and carried through their objective.

Then the Stars and Stripes was raised for the first time in that part of the world. The Marines turned the fort's cannons on the castle of the governor and soon drove the remaining defenders out of the battle. This matter spawned a couple of lines of a song about the "Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli."

Seven years later, during the War of 1812, a seagoing Marine became the only leatherneck to command a Navy vessel. Lt John Marshall Gamble, with 31 Marines, sailed aboard *Essex* Oct. 22, 1812.

The *Essex* crew captured three En-
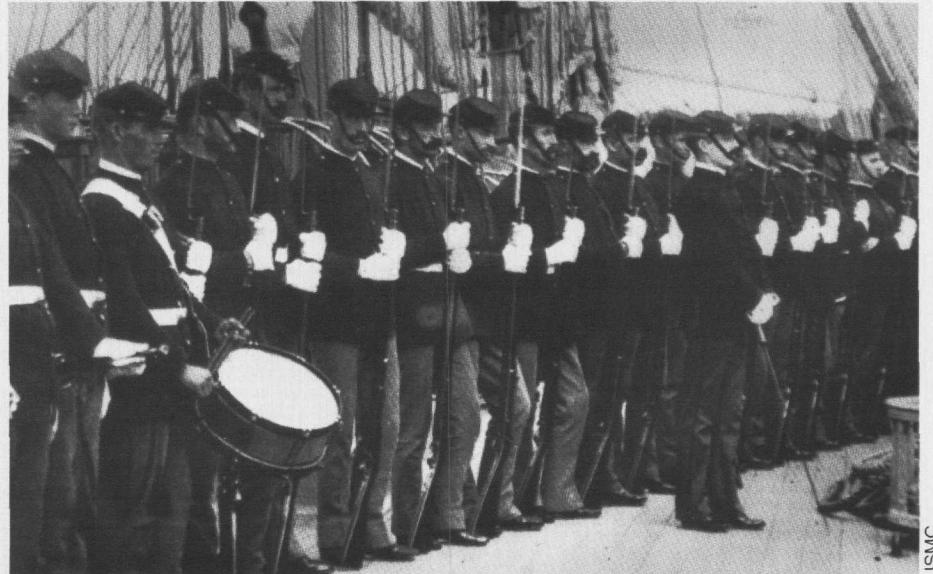
This 1885 detachment (above) aboard USS *Portsmouth* symbolized the soldierly bearing and discipline expected of Marines on ship. By 1900, (below) uniforms had changed somewhat, but Marines sailing on men-of-war in Asiatic waters were prepared for action in the Philippines and China.

glish whaling ships which were fitted for combat, and Gamble was given command of one of them, *Greenwich*.

In 1813, Gamble and a crew of 14 men engaged a British whaler. The American commander used the best of naval strategy to block the escape of the English ship, then maneuvered into position for a few broadside cannon volleys and convinced the English sailors to strike their colors in surrender.

The ship was *Seringapatam*—the terror of American whalers in the Pacific until that day in July when the English vessel and crew encountered the Marine-commanded warship in the Gálapagos Islands.

Gamble later had a big problem with a mutiny after being left to hold some fortifications in the Marquesas Islands. The main body of ships and sailors was to return later, but were instead captured.

Gamble was soon beset with the mutiny, which he, his Marines and some loyal sailors were unable to contain. They fled, were later captured in the Sandwich Islands and held captive until the end of the war.

Gamble later reached New York during August 1815, where he was promoted to major and later lieutenant colonel. He retired from the Marine Corps in 1834.

A young Marine captain served aboard *Constitution* during that war and was involved in the battle with *Java* Dec. 29, 1812, after engagements with *Cyane* and *Levant* during February of the same year.

Archibald Henderson was cited for his actions while on sea duty, promoted to brevet major in 1814 and went on to become a brigadier general, the fifth Commandant of the Marine Corps and the man who would guide and shape the

Manning ships' guns was still a major part of leatherneck sea duties prior to and during World War I.

Corps for more than 38 of its most formative years.

Another legendary Marine, Major General Smedley Butler, known as "Old Gimlet Eye," pulled his sea duty some time later. Butler was awarded his first Medal of Honor for his actions in Vera Cruz, Mexico. The second came a year later, in 1915, for bravery and forceful leadership as commander of a detachment of Marines and seamen of USS *Connecticut* in repulsing Caco bandit resistance at Fort Riviere, Haiti.

During the time between Henderson and Butler, seagoing Marines, among other duties:

• fought the Barbary pirates and pirates in the Caribbean

• fought Indians and pirates in Florida

• held a flag-raising ceremony in Oregon to cement U.S. claims to the western territory

• landed in Haiti to protect American lives and interests

• battled a fire in the Virgin Islands that threatened to burn St. Thomas

• landed in the Falkland Islands to protect American lives and property

• landed in Sumatra, Argentina, Peru and several South Sea islands to protect Americans

• acted to suppress slave trade

• partook of diplomatic ceremonies in Japan

• landed in China several times to protect American lives and property

• landed in the Fiji Islands to avenge the murders of American seamen

• fought on both sides in most of the major sea battles of the Civil War

• fought the battle of the "Citadel" in Korea

• landed in Haiti and Egypt on peacekeeping missions and

• fought in the Spanish-American War.

As the storm clouds of World War I began looming on the horizon, Marine strength ashore was growing. With the advent of steamships that strength was more easily and rapidly projected to trouble spots around the world.

But even as transportation grew quicker and more reliable, and the threat of mutiny became almost nonexistent, shipboard Marines found ways to help in time of war.

During World War II, with the spotlight on the landings of divisions on obscure islands, a Marine detachment aboard the cruiser *Philadelphia* landed at the port of Safi, French Morocco, to secure the airport there until the Army could arrive. That's where the Marine Detachment celebrated the Marine Corps Birthday in 1942.

June 6, 1944, was a journey back to the past. Marines took their rifles aloft during the Normandy invasion with the mission to shoot and detonate floating mines in the paths of ships in the English Channel as the invading force made its way to the soon-to-be-bloodied beaches.

"If the Marines are abolished, half the efficiency of the Navy will be destroyed. They are as necessary to the well being of a ship as the officers."

—RAdm David D. Porter, 1863

They also manned secondary batteries in cruisers and battleships.

Marines from USS *Philadelphia* (CL-41) and *Augusta* (CA-31) went ashore Aug. 29, 1944, during the invasion of southern France to take charge of some 700 Germans who had been manning fortified garrisons around the French harbor of Marseilles.

They manned naval guns as Japanese suicide bombers off Iwo Jima, the Philippines and Okinawa threw themselves at the U.S. Navy's largest and most powerful war ships. There were also Marines on board the battleship USS *Missouri* (BB-63) in Tokyo Bay, when the "kamikaze" attacks finally failed and the defeated Japanese were humbled into signing a formal surrender on Sept. 2, 1945.

The end of the war also saw the dawning of the atomic age and the start of more than four decades of cold war with the Soviet Union. Initially, the U.S. military, made up citizen soldiers serving for the duration of WW II, quickly reduced in size, but carefully redefined the individual services' roles and missions.

The National Security Act of 1947, Title 10, United States Code 5013 essentially reaffirmed in writing the Corps' seagoing mission: "the Marine Corps shall provide detachments and organizations for service on armed vessels of the Navy, and shall provide security detachments for the protecton of naval property at naval stations and bases."

When war broke out in 1950 on the Korean Peninsula, the Navy responded by sending essentially the same carriers, battleships and cruisers it had used in World War II. There would, however, be no sea battles such as those at Midway, the Coral Sea and off Guadalcanal: not in the Korean War or, for that matter, not anywhere on the high seas for the next five decades. Naval guns were essentially for artillery which fired in support of Marines and soldiers slugging it out in the hills just up from the sea. Naval aviation cleared the skies and provided floating airfields, which supported strategic and tactical maneuvering on land. However, the Marine detachments remained basically unchanged in their duties at sea.

As the Cold War and the technology it spawned escalated, and ships were sent to the shores of Lebanon, Santo Domingo, Formosa, Cuba and a place in French Indochina called Vietnam, Marines served aboard carriers and cruisers—some of which had became nuclear powered and nuclear capable. Battleships, in and out of mothballs since shortly after Korea, were for the most part out of service, with one exception.

Service on aircraft carriers was arguably the height of seagoing leatherneck duties. Detachments such as this one in the 1950s were larger than those on cruisers or battleships.
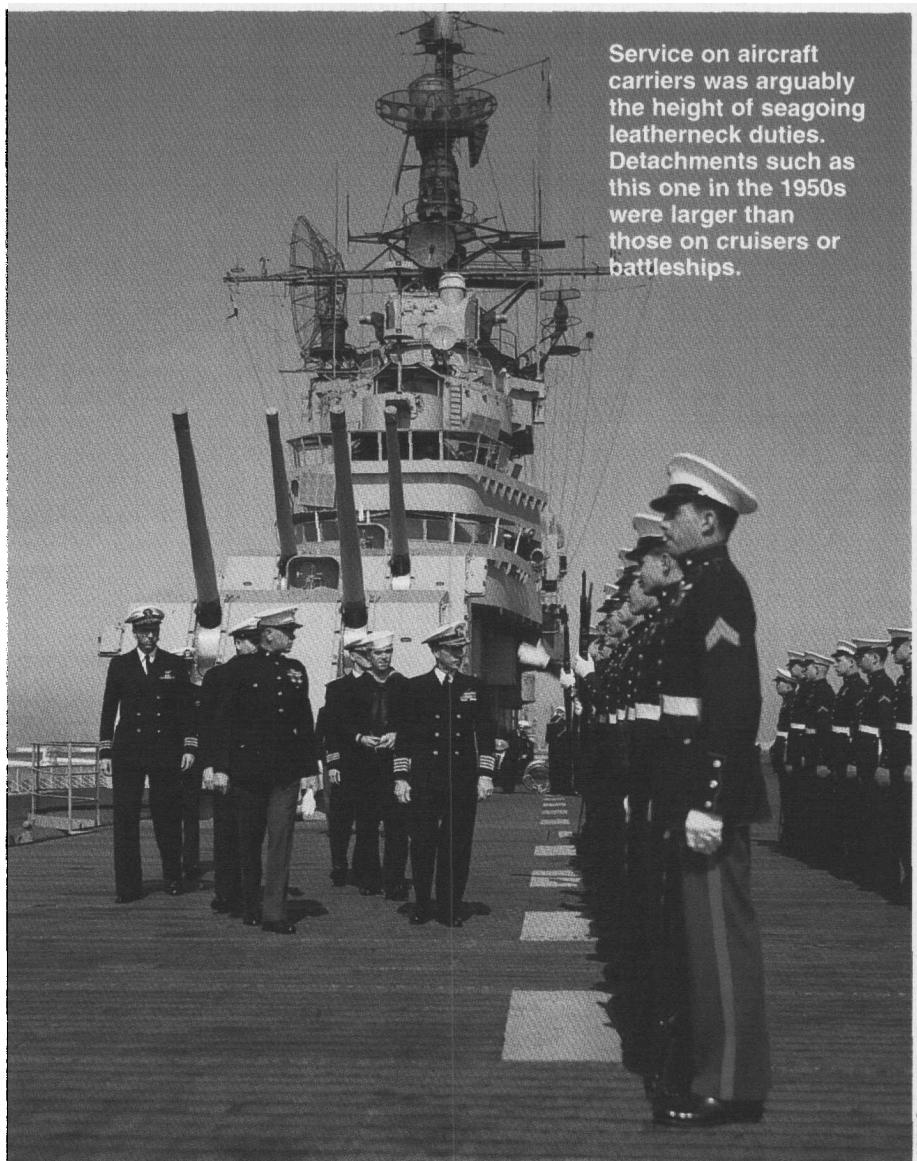
Marines were aboard the battleship USS *New Jersey* (BB-62) as she sent shells from her 16-inch guns onto targets on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and dug in behind rice paddy dikes on the coastal plain (during Tet of 1968 she fired 3,615 16-inch shells and 11,500 5-inch shells supporting leathernecks). Marines were serving in the aircraft carriers on "Yankee Station" and in the Tonkin Gulf. When a missile from an aircraft accidentally exploded July 29, 1967, on the deck of USS *Forrestal* (CVA-59), killing 134 and injuring 64, Marines helped fight the fires and provided damage control with their fellow shipmates.

There is no doubt that the members of the Marine detachments and sailors of the ship's complement saw themselves as shipmates, and for the Marines, in particular, sea duty had become a career enhancer and a proud tradition.

Navy regulations, Paragraph 1047 stated in part: "A Marine Detachment detailed to duty on board a ship of the Navy shall form a separate division thereof. Its functions shall be: (1) To provide for operations ashore, as a part of the ships landing force; or as a part of the landing force of Marines from ships of the fleet or subdivision thereof; or as an independent force for limited operations. (2) To provide gun crews. (3) To provide internal security of a ship. (4) To provide for the proper rendering of military honors." They also provided the ship's captain an orderly, brig sentries and special weapons (read nuclear) sentries.

Detachments usually consisted of two officers and 35 to 44 Marines on cruisers and two officers with 46 to 55 leathernecks on carriers. They still manned 5-inch, single or dual mounted guns, 3-inch guns or twin .50-caliber machine guns, trained sailors for landing parties and taught small-unit tactics.

The officers found sea duty professionally enhancing. In addition to their duties with the detachment, additional duties included air spotting on cruisers

In more recent years Marines did man some of the ships' defensive guns, but their roles continued to be replaced with sophisticated automated technologies.

and battleships, serving as legal officers or on courts-martial and special boards, and as officers of the deck when in port. As such, the Marine officers were involved in naval matters which their fellow officers in the Fleet Marine Force were seldom exposed to.

In 1958, Captain William M. Cryan, who commanded a detachment in the cruiser USS *Los Angeles* (CA-135), wrote in the *Marine Corps Gazette*: "Professionally, sea duty places relatively junior officers and Staff NCOs on their own. There is no battalion or regiment to bail them out when they run into trouble. Sea duty teaches how to command, if only from forcing you to do it yourself."

Also in 1958, Major George C. Fox, another former Mar Det commander, wrote in *Gazette:* "Few if any assignments nowadays place a junior officer with troops so 'far away from the Marine Corps' as does sea duty. The Detachment CO stands or fails on his own. And what better training!"

The times, however, were changing. As ships replaced guns with guided missiles and computer controlled weapons systems for defense, the role of Marine detachments started getting a closer scrutiny. The last gun cruiser, USS *Oklahoma City* (CL-91), flagship of the Seventh Fleet, was retired in the late 1970s. Her replacement, the amphibious command ship USS *Blue Ridge* (LCC-19), became flagship in 1979 with her sister ship, USS *Mount Whitney* (LCC-20), becoming flagship of the Second Fleet in 1981. Initially, both had Marine detachments. However, both were built specifically for an amphibious command-ship role, and as such had other Marines aboard whose duties were directly related to the combat operations center helping direct and coordinate leatherneck operations ashore.

Little by little the Navy and Marine Corps stripped the brass buttons away from the ship's detachments. In 1979 then-Commandant of the Marine Corps General Louis H. Wilson signed a new mission statement:

"Provide security for special weapons storage spaces and for the transfer of special weapons aboard the ship, provide physical security for the ship; provide gun crews, as required; and perform such other appropriate duties when so ordered by competent authority. However, these additional duties may not detract from or interfere with the performance of the primary duties."

Further, Marine detachments dropped the duties of supplying landing parties and overseeing ships' brigs.

When Gen Paul X. Kelley became Commandant in 1986, he further revised the mission statement for Marine detachments, declaring they were to "provide security for special weapons storage spaces and for the transfer of special weapons aboard the ship. Perform such other appropriate duties when so ordered by competent authority. However, these additional duties may not detract or interfere with the primary duties."

Those duties, although diminished, were worth noting. In the 1980s and early 1990s battleships were brought back to life again. Marines were with *New Jersey* when she shelled terrorist camps in the hills beyond Beirut after the 1983 barracks and embassy bombing. They were on board USS *Iowa* (BB-61) when one of her massive gun turrets exploded, killing 47, and helped provide damage control. They watched Tomahawk cruise missiles launch from USS *Wisconsin* (BB-64) headed for downtown Baghdad in the first barrage of Desert Storm Jan. 16, 1991.

However, using Marines to provide security for special weapons on ships had become selective. While most of the U.S. Navy's men-of-war were special weapons capable, many questioned why Marines provided security for little more than 10 percent of the ships.

It, of course, boiled down to manpower and priorities. Reductions in forces during the late 1970s and again in the 1990s forced the Corps to reevaluate how to best meet its mission under the National Security Act of 1947. The nation had also entered into another dangerous era, one which created new, tough problems and difficult answers: namely, how to deal with the threat of international terrorism.

In the late 1980s, officials created the Marine Corps Security Forces (MCSF) in order to "provide trained MCSF personnel and cadres to security departments at designated Navy installations; provide mobile training teams to support antiterrorism training at Naval installations; augment training at Naval installations; augment fleet/force Inspectors General to oversee employment and use of Naval Security Forces at Navy installations; to maintain a Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team for deployment as directed by the Chief of Naval Operations."

"From the earliest association with sea life my eyes have been accustomed to see the well-disciplined Marines at their posts on shipboard and at our naval station, guarding the public property and ensuring discipline on board ship."

—*RAdm David D. Porter, 1863*

Last Seagoing Detachment Stands Down

Friday, May 1 marked a historic day for the Navy/Marine Corps team. The Navy's last Marine Detachment (Mar Det) aboard an aircraft carrier bid farewell to the ship that had been its home since 1993.

In a ceremony held in Hangar Bay Two on board USS *George Washington* (CVN-73), Captain Lindell G. Rutherford, the ship's commanding officer, called it "the end of an era in Marine Corps history."

"It's been a great piece of history between Mar Det and these, the Navy's capital ships," Rutherford said. "We cannot allow [Mar Det] to just walk down the brow without celebrating what has truly been a great marriage between sailors and Marines on board aircraft carriers."

During the ceremony, First Lieutenant Grant Goodrich, *GW's* Marine Detachment commanding officer, took the opportunity to reflect on the traditional relationship between the two services.

"[Marines] have served as riflemen, as gunners...'soldiers on ships,' " Goodrich said. "Today marks a sad day as that traditional relationship changes, but Marine security forces will continue to serve elsewhere in the Navy community. This has been, is now and will always be our job."

That job has carried the Marine Detachment through three Mediterranean/Arabian Gulf deployments and through the Suez Canal a total of eight times. It's an experience Mar Det Marines called unique.

According to Mar Det guard member, Lance Corporal Tom T. Mews from Wisconsin Rapids, Wis., "It was an opportunity I never knew existed when I joined the Marine Corps."

"I cannot imagine a better environment in which to operate or a better environment to lead Marines," Goodrich agreed. "I want to thank the Marines for their dedication to
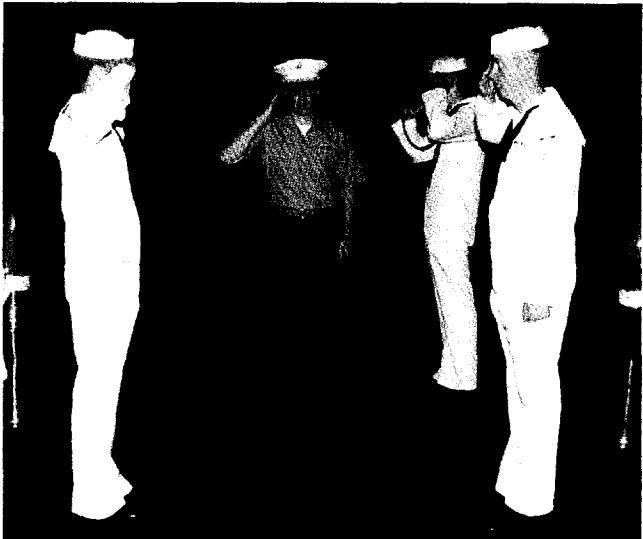
First Lieutenant Grant Goodrich, commanding officer of the Marine Detachment, USS *George Washington*, was piped over the side May 1.

the security of the ship and to each other. They truly embody the spirit of the Marines—Semper Fidelis—always faithful. They are faithful to the command, faithful to each other and to the mission."

Gunnery Sergeant Henry J. Tomasko Jr., the Mar Det guard chief, said the carrier duty was anything but boring.

"I've worked with some outstanding Marines here. They were very motivated," he said. "When I got here, I needed a shot of motivation, and that's what I got from every one of them."

—JO3 Pete Robertson

The Marine detachments fell under the umbrella of this new organization.

Today, when the Navy and Marine Corps want quick and effective protection against terrorism, sabotage and physical security, they look to the MCSF headquartered in Norfolk, Va., and trained in Chesapeake, Va. These Marines spend time analyzing job requirements, designing and developing training programs, implementing and evaluating instruction for the purpose of standardizing training in physical security and antiterrorism measures, combat weapons skills and tactical response techniques to Marines and sailors assigned security duties.

The ongoing antiterrorism efforts greatly changed many of the traditional roles of Marine security forces both afloat and ashore. The image of brass-buttoned leathernecks, bedecked in blues, checking passes at Navy gates or as admiral's orderly on the bridge of a nuclear carrier, while not completely outdated, was becoming less a mission.

In the end, however, there really weren't many ships left for the Marines to provide detachments. The battleships have again been mothballed or turned into floating memorials and museums. The modern cruisers, armed and packed with guided-missiles, have little room or mission for Marines. The Navy also began enhancing its own master-at-arms for ships' security. The amphibious command ships gave up their Marine detachments in the early 1990s. And the nation's remaining 11 carriers have for years been scaled down to one officer and 25 enlisted Marines in each detachment.

To make matters worse, in 1997 the Quadrennial Defense Review recommended more than 3,000 cuts from the Corps' nonoperating forces. The largest cut was made by removing 1,771 billets from the MCSF battalion. The Commandant had decided to beef up the Fleet Marine Force in favor of the ships' detachments, a strategic manpower decision he was forced to make.

By January 1998 All Marine Corps Message 24/98 announced that all Marine ships' detachments (totaling 11 officers/275 enlisted) were to be disestablished. The nondeployed detachments stood down on Jan. 31, while the remaining deployed detachments were to stand down following their deployments.

Those Marines from the disestablished detachments were to be used to create a second Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team (FAST) company.

Marines from the Corps' two FAST companies will be rotationally deployed and placed under the control of the commanders in chief, U.S. Naval Forces Europe, Pacific fleet, and commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command for assignments as required.

One of their missions is, if needed, to provide security aboard ships.

So for now a 223-year tradition comes to an end. And although there are Marines still afloat aboard the amphibious ships of the Navy, which carry them to the fight, the brightwork of the Navy's capital ships will certainly lack some old luster.