

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS *HISTORICAL COMPANY*

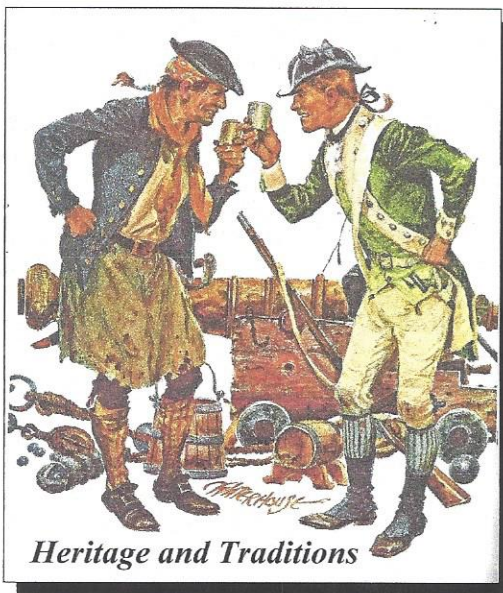
Heritage and Traditions of the Corps the Blending of Legend and Fact;

There is often confusion between the words history and heritage. Although they go hand-in-hand, one (heritage) is created out of the other (history). History, by definition is “the objective recounting of past events, while heritage is defined as “something immaterial, as a style or philosophy, that is passed from one generation to the next.” The third word that ties the other two together is tradition, which can be summed up as ceremonies and rituals that highlight and commemorate our history and heritage. Although we often have a tendency to superimpose heritage over history, the development and recounting of that heritage all too often distorts or even disregards historical facts in order to present a more positive image. We as Marines, both as a method of reinforcing our reputation and as a survival mechanism, have often fallen into that trap in an effort to preserve and present our history.

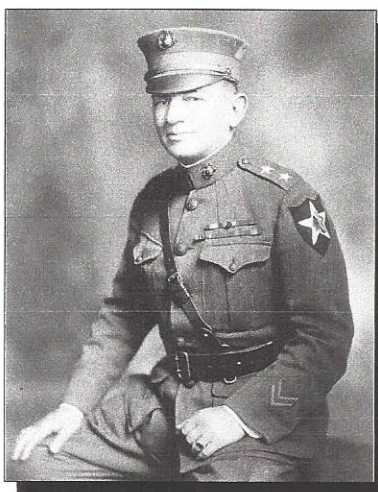
The Marine Corps has been fighting on two fronts our entire existence. One has been against all those that would oppose the United States and threaten American citizens. The other has been against our own governmental system in a continual fight for political survival. After vitally every major conflict in which America (and the Marines) has been involved petitions have been brought before Congress for the abolishment of the Marine Corps as a separate service and/or absorbing them into another service. There have been many causes from economic issues to politics and inter-service rivalry. The Marines have continually prevailed supported by both deeds and public opinion.

Pride of person and pride in unit is instilled in every Marine. To help establish this pride in the service, and build moral, Marine recruits for decades had committed to memory the traditions of our Corps. Many of which revolve around visual symbols that are part of our uniform. Although many of these traditions are loosely based on historical incidents, many of the popular traditions are more often then not built around legends and myths designed to glamorize the Corps' History. Ironically, many of these “traditions” that would become “official” by the mid 20th century, were not established until around 1921.

After World War One, despite the accomplishments of the Marine Corps, or more likely because of them and the public attention and accolades they invoked, the Marines were again embroiled in a political fight for its life, and Commandant John Lejeune knew that favorable public opinion was crucial in winning the fight. A petition had been brought before Congress to abolish the Corps as a separate service and absorb them into the Army. Gen. Lejeune knew that not only the deeds of the Corps, but more importantly the American public's awareness and opinion of the Marines were essential to their political survival. In 1921 he would establish many of the traditions we take for granted today. The first, to act as a rallying point for the moral and Espirit-de-Corps of our Marines and establish the longevity of the Corps in the public's eye, was to declare 10 November 1775 as the “official” founding (‘birthday’) of the Marine Corps. Along with that proclamation he would have Marine Corps Public Affairs compile the now iconic list of Marine Corps Traditions, many revolving around elements of the Marine uniform. Over the following decades these “traditions” would inadvertently establish themselves as “fact” to both our Marines and the public. They have notably served their purpose in evoking a positive image of the Corps and its history. Even today, despite historic facts, the sight of the Quatrefoil on a Marine officer's cover, or the red trouser stripe on the uniform of our NCOs and officers evoke images of warfare at sea during the War of 1812, or the capture of Chapultepec castle in the Mexican War. However, we must understand where historical fact stops and legend begins. The following highlighted information is the “official”



Heritage and Traditions

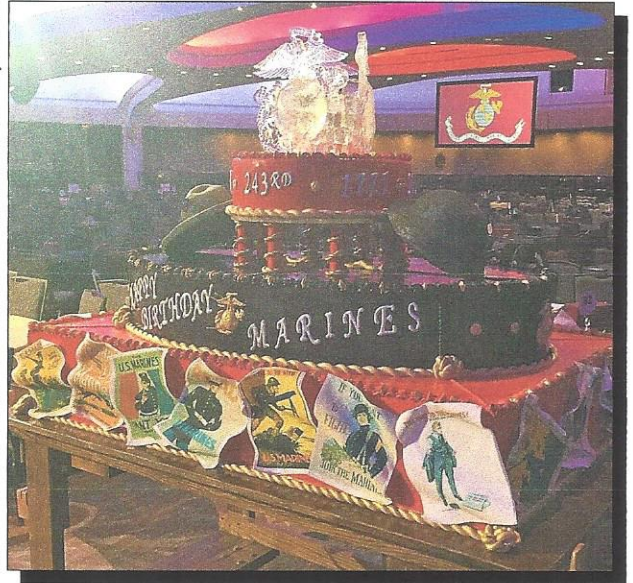


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traditional history and symbols of the Corps that are most commonly ask about. Listed after each item are historical facts on which these traditions are based. As a Marine you should have these “traditions” committed to memory, but, you should also be familiar with the facts behind these traditions.

- **Tradition: The “Birthday” of the United States Marine Corps is 10 November 1775.**

Facts: The *Continental* Marines were formed as a regular branch of our country's armed services by an act of the Second Continental Congress on 10 November 1775. However, because of America’s distrust of the Monarch system and their use of a standing military force to dominate the civil populus in country's throughout Europe, at the close of the Revolutionary War the Continental Marines, like the Navy and most of the Army, were disbanded. The *United States* Marine Corps as it exists today, was permanently established by the Congressional Act of July 11, 1798 at the beginning of the Naval "Quasi-War" with France. For the first 125 years of our existence 11 July 1798 was recognized as the official establishment of the Corps. In 1921 during a political fight for the Corps’ survival Commandant Gen. John Lejeune would, in an effort to boost Marine Corps moral and raise public awareness and opinion, issued Marine Corps Order No. 47 officially recognizing 10 November 1775 as the founding “Birthday” of the Marine Corps. Gen. Lejeune’s message is still traditionally read as part of the formal ceremonies at Marine Corps birthday celebrations every year.



- **Tradition: The Marine Corps was established at Tun Tavern, Philadelphia, PA.**

Facts: The Continental Marines were established by an act of the Continental Congress on 10 November 1775. Although tradition holds that the first recruiting took place at Tun Tavern in Philadelphia, the details of this legend are still subject to debate. Tun Tavern was built in 1768 near the waterfront on the corner of Water Street and Tun Alley in Philadelphia. Its name originates from the old English word ‘tun’ meaning a cask or keg of beer. On 28 November 1775 Congress commissioned Samuel Nicholas a Captain of Marines and task him with the raising of the two battalions authorized by Congress. Philadelphia became the center for the raising of those first Continental Marines and many taverns and public houses became centers for recruiting, but there is only subjective evidence that Tun Tavern may have been one of those.

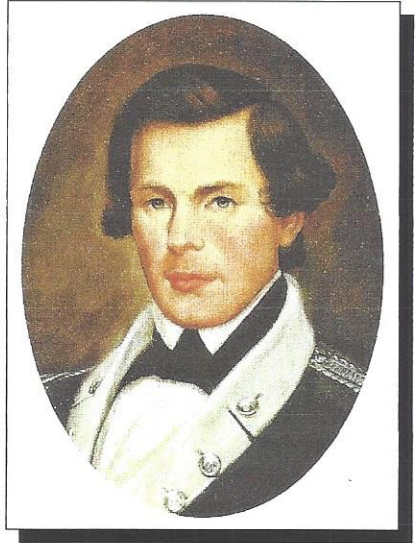


However, Tun Tavern does eventually play a direct role with the Marines. Following the New Providence Raid in the winter/spring of 1776 Congress had authorized the building of 13 new Continental war ships. Four of which were to be built in Philadelphia. Congress also appointed the Marine officers for each of those vessels. One of those officers was Robert Mullan, owner and proprietor of Tun Tavern. Appointed as Captain of Marines for the 24 gun frigate *Delaware*, on 25 June 1776, he would be responsible for raising the detachment of Marines for his ship. Mullan established his Inn as a recruiting base and home to the company of Marines he was raising for the *Delaware*. Ironically, Mullan himself would never go to sea but did see action with the battalion of Marines that would serve with Washington during the Trenton and Princeton campaigns. To distinguish his company, Capt. Mullan would have his Marines wear red facings on their uniform instead of the prescribed white.

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- **Tradition: *The first Commandant of the Marine Corps was Samuel Nicholas.***

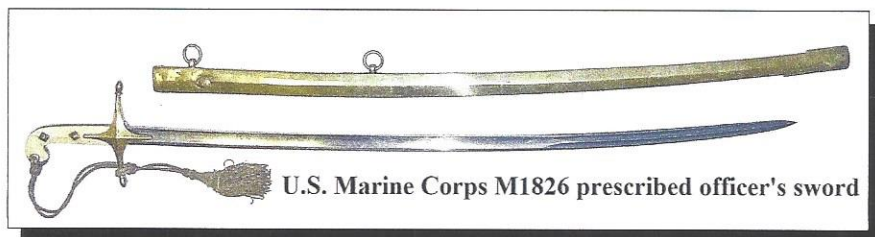
Facts: On November 28, 1775 Congress commissioned the first Marine officer, Captain Samuel Nicholas. Promoted to Major in June 1776 Nicholas would remain the senior officer of the Continental Marines throughout the Revolution, but the title of Commandant, as of yet, did not exist. Further, by the end of 1776 the Continental Marines would no longer be as closely knit as the group envisioned by Congress in November 1775. Marine companies were raised and trained independently of the original battalion structure written into the 10 November resolve. What began as a small but unified expeditionary force in January 1776, by the end of the year had grown into a fragmented force of individual detachments. The developments and political compromises of that first year doomed the Continental Marines to never again achieve the status of a consolidated and integrated unit.” Although Nicholas would remain the senior Continental Marine officer he would never enjoy the overall command of the Continental Marines. From the winter of 1776-77 through the remainder of the war the Continental Marines would be recruited, trained, and fight as independent ship’s detachments. Although many of these detachments would demonstrate great valor in numerous individual landing operations and engagements at sea, they would never again come together as a unified “Corps.”



In 1798, with the establishment of the permanent United States Marine Corps, William Borrows became the Corps’ first official leader; in April 1800 he became the first officer to officially receive the title of Commandant. However, today the Corps’ tradition still harold’s Nicholas as its first Commandant.

- **Tradition: *The official dress sword of Marine Corps Officers is the Mameluke Sword. It is copied after the sword presented to Lt Presley O’Bannon by the former Pasha of Tripoli.***

Facts: A sword was presented as a gift to Lieutenant Presley O’Bannon by a desert chieftain and former Pasha of Tripoli at the end of the Barbary Wars. It symbolized the exploits of O’Bannon and his Marines on the shores of Tripoli in 1805. The Mamelukes, of which this desert chieftain was a part, were fierce and renowned desert warriors of North Africa. A second sword was presented to Lt. O’Bannon by the Commonwealth of Virginia. Tradition has it that the swords presented to O’Bannon were of a Mameluke pattern, and soon became the symbol of authority of Marine Corps officers. In fact, neither the swords received by Lt O’Bannon bore little resemblance to the standard Marine officers sword with what we today call a Mameluke hilt. However, swords with a Mameluke type of hilt have been used by British officers since before the American Revolution, and are still being used as a badge of rank for their General Officers today. The design appealed to many American Marine officers in the late 1700s, who at the time had to purchase their own swords but were given no specified pattern. They fancied this fashionable British Mamaluke-hilted pattern and adopted it as their own. By 1826 the Marine Corps would make this pattern sword official, posting regulations that



mandated a specific design of Mameluke hilted sword with brass scabbard for all Marine officers. However, this would change in 1859. Commandant Harris would adopt the Army’s 1850 Foot Officer’s sword for both Marine Officers and Sergeants. This would remain the regulation throughout the American Civil War until 1875 when a

Mameluke hilt sword was reintroduced for officers. Its hilt and scabbard design would set the pattern that is still used by all Marine Officers today. Ironically Marine Sergeants would continue to use the 1859 pattern sword becoming the current NCO sword.

- **Tradition: *The Quatrefoil worn on the top of Marine Officer’s Service and Dress Caps stems from the practice of Marine Ships Detachment Officers during the War of 1812, placing a piece of knotted rope on top of their cover so that they could be recognized by their Marine marksmen in the fighting tops.***

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Facts: Although this tale is glamorous, it has no basis in fact. Although it was a tactical practice to place some Marines in the fighting tops of a vessel to snipe at an enemy ship's gunners and officers, before the ships closed to boarding distance. However, when a boarding party was sent aboard an enemy vessel any firing from the tops ceased for fear of hitting friendlies. Once an enemy ship was close enough to board, the Marines would be brought from the tops and formed along the gunwales (deck railing) to repel boarders. Although there are notable exceptions, the Marines were normally considered "too valuable" to be wasted as the initial boarders. Further, a Marine officer's hat at that time was a chapeau or "fore and aft" design with no flat surface on top to put a rope 'quatrefoil.' The first official use of the Quatrefoil on the covers of Marine officers was prescribed in the uniform regulations of 1859. The officer's fatigue cap, following French military fashion of the time, was 'to have a knot (quatrefoil) in the center of the crown of black ribbed silk braid three-sixteenths of an inch wide.' This pattern continued on, transitioning from the top of the fatigue cap to the top of Marine Officer's Service and Dress covers, where it still appears today. Although, historical facts gives the quatrefoil no ties to the War of 1812, today the sight of the device on a Marine Officer's cover still evokes visions of the deeds of those Marines during our "Second War of Independence."



- **Tradition:** *The red stripe worn on the dress trousers of all Marine Corps officers and NCOs, often called the "blood stripe", is traditionally attributed to the Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers that lost their lives while leading the attack on Chapultepec castle during the Mexican-American War in 1848.*

Facts: The "Blood Stripe" was first officially adopted for line officers and sergeants in 1892 following the US Army's system for identifying their officers and NCOs. Marine officer's trousers would be marked by a 1¼ inch red stripe down the outer seam, and sergeants with a one inch stripe. Marine Corporals would not be authorized the stripe until 1896. In reality, the use of trouser stripes as one of the identifiers of rank was adopted by the U.S. Army in 1825, and the Marines in 1833. The first Marine trouser stripes were not red however. In 1833 the stripe for officers and sergeants was of "buff" or off white in color to match the trim of the newly designated coat. In 1840 the sergeants and line officer's stripe would change to a 1¼ inch dark blue stripe with a red welt on either edge. Staff Officers would have a 1¾ inch red stripe worn on dark blue trouser when in winter dress, but would wear no stripe when in summer or field undress. In 1859 trouser stripes would be discontinued and would not reappear on Marine uniforms until 1892. Although the tradition associating the red stripe with the bloody battle of Chapultepec, during the Mexican-American War was not written until 1921, today the site of the red stripe on our dress blues evokes visions of the deeds of those officers and NCOs leading the way to Mexico City.



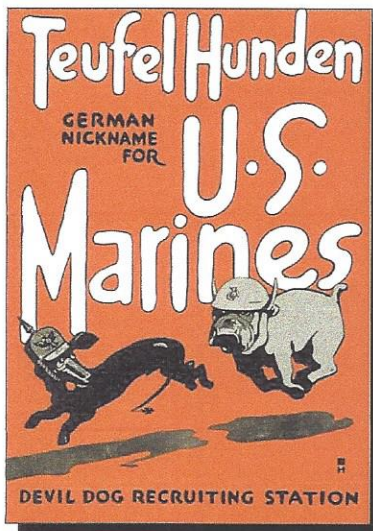
- **Tradition:** *The nickname "Leatherneck" was given to the Marines in the 19th century because of the leather stocks they wore around their necks to protect them from cutlass blows.*

Facts: The term "Leatherneck" as applied to Marines is widely used but few people associate it with the uniform or era that the nickname first originated. US Marines as well as US soldiers, copying their European counterparts, wore a black leather stock (collar), from 1798 to 1875. This traditionally is believed to be the source of the name. According to legend, the stock originally served two purposes; when worn it improved the posture and kept the head up, and in combat supposedly protected the jugular vein from the slash of a saber or cutlass. However, although the first part holds true, the protective value of the stock is pure myth. In reality, the stock's leather was too thin to be any protection from the strike of an edged weapon, and most personal accounts indicate that the stock was hated by the Marines who had to wear it. To the individual Marine the best defense against a cutlass was the sixteen inch steel bayonet on the end of their five foot musket. Both the Army and the Marines continued to wear a separate leather stock with their dress uniform until the early 1870s when it was discontinued as a separate uniform item. However, the Marines, in their 1875 uniform regulations, would now add a leather tab to cover the "V" opening in the front of the collar of the new dress coat. This is still reflected in the cloth tab behind the collar closure of our modern dress blues. It is believed that during that time is when the nick name first started. At first the Marines disliked the name feeling that it was derogatory, but within a few decades like many of our other monikers, the Corps would embrace it as a title of honor.

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- **Tradition:** *The nickname “Devil Dogs” was given to the Marines by the Germans during World War One.*

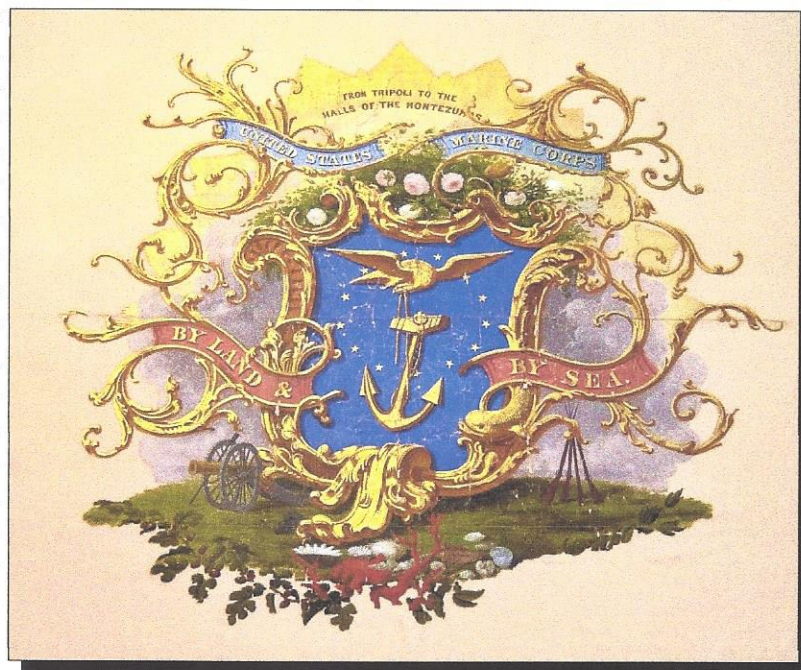
Facts: Although this nickname is based on historical fact, the origins have been blurred and embellished over the years. The 4th Marine Brigade rapidly distinguished itself in action in France during the First World War. Tradition holds that after the battle of Belleau Wood a captured German officer referred to the Marines as “*Teufelhunde*” - “Hounds from Hell,” after a wild and savage mountain beast of Bavarian folklore. However, there is no evidence that this actually happened nor is there any German document that refers to the Marines as such. In April 1918, long before Belleau Wood, American reporters were already using the nickname “Devil Dogs” in newspaper reports, and it is believed that “*teufelhunde*” is actually an American attempt to translate Devil Dog into German instead of the other way around.



All the same the Germans had a begrudging respect for the Marines, comparing them to their own Storm Troopers. The Marine's long range accuracy with the rifle, and reckless tenacious and aggressive actions with the bayonet in hand-to-hand combat, intimidated the German forces who would often refer to them as “American Marine thugs.” Although the Marines didn't particularly like the name at first, they soon started taking pride in this “compliment” from their enemy. By 1921 the name would become embedded as part of Marine Corps lore and has stuck ever since.

- **Tradition:** *The Marine Corps motto is “Semper Fidelis” (Latin for “Always Faithful”), often shortened today in Marine slang to Semper Fi.*

Facts: From its beginnings the Corps has served under several mottos and phrases, both official and unofficial. During the American Revolution it was “*Don't Tread On Me.*” emblazoned on Continental Marine drums. “*Fortitudine*” (Latin for “With Courage and Fortitude”) became the catch phrase during the first part of the 19th century. Shortly after the end of the Mexican War, the Marines were presented the so-called “Tripoli-Montezuma” flag, which bore the motto “*By Land & by Sea.*” a paraphrasing of the British Royal Marine Latin motto “*Per Mare, Per Terram.*” This same flag would also be adorned with the phrase “*From Tripoli to the Halls of the Montezumas.*” When the present Marine Corps Eagle, Globe, and Anchor emblem was adopted in 1868, the Navy Department authorized the use of those same words, By Land & by Sea, on the new flag of the United States Marine Corps. In a short time though, those words were soon replaced by a new motto “*Semper Fidelis*” (Latin for “Always Faithful”) on the streamers above the eagle. This was officially adopted as the Marine Corps motto in 1880. The march, “*Semper Fidelis*” was composed by John Philip Sousa, the celebrated director of the Marine Band, in 1888. This tune is the only march ever officially authorized for a designated armed service by Congress.



- **Tradition:** *The official emblem of the Marine Corps is the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor.*

Facts: Throughout its history the Corps has had many insignia representing it. The first was a simple anchor worn on buttons. By the early 1800s a brass plate, emblazoned with a coat of arms containing an Eagle, anchor, cannon and other militaria, along with the word MARINE underneath, was adopted. This would last until 1820. In 1804 Marine officers would start wearing a button with the now famous eagle and anchor, which is still in use on Marine buttons today. This design was adopted as a dress cap insignia in 1852. By 1859 the Corps adopted a “Hunting Horn” insignia

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with an "M" in its center as a cap ornament. The familiar emblem of eagle, globe and anchor was first officially adopted in 1868. The globe and anchor embodies the heritage of worldwide service and sea traditions. The spread eagle, symbol of the Nation itself, now holds in its beak a streamer upon which is inscribed the famous motto of the United States Marines: *Semper Fidelis*, which means in Latin "Always Faithful."

- **Tradition: The official Marine Corps Colors are Red and Gold.**

Facts: These were established as the official colors of the Corps in the early twentieth century, but their origins stem from the beginnings of the Corps. The famous blue uniform of the Marine Corps, who's original design was first authorized by Secretary of War James McHenry, in August of 1797, just prior to the formal establishment of the United States Marine Corps in 1798. In it are incorporated many of the traditions of the Corps. Blue or "Navy Blue" an inconspicuous color at sea and employed generally by the naval forces of all countries, was selected by the Marines for their uniforms, while the pattern and trimmings of red and gold served at the same time to make them distinctive. The first adoption of the colors red and gold traces the tradition back over two centuries. Tradition puts forth the fact that the early organization, duties and regulations of the American Marines were patterned primarily after the ways and customs of their forerunners, the British Marines. It is believed the the traditional red of the British uniform had its effect in the adoption of red for the uniform of the United States Marines. Today both the Royal Marines and U.S. Marines mark 'scarlet' and gold as official colors. The less glamorous facts as to the origin of the traditional Marine Corps uniform, through new research, has been recently brought to light by historians. When Congress authorized the permanent establishment of United States Military Forces, including the United States Navy and United States Marine Corps, in 1798 there remained a surplus of uniforms left over from the short lived and recently disbanded Legion of the United States. For economic reasons the Marines were issued these surplus uniforms which were of Navy blue trimmed in red. Whether by accident or design, the newly authorized uniforms were coincidentally made of dark blue cloth with red and yellow (gold) trim as authorized for the Marines by the Secretary of War.

- **Other Marine Corps Traditional symbols.**

- The color of the forest green winter service uniform, which first appeared in 1912, is very distinct from the Army's olive drab uniform. Again there is no official reason stated for the selection of this color, but it may have been influenced by the by the "forest or hunter" green color of coats worn by some Continental Marines during the American Revolution.

- The famous Marine Corps button, depicting a spread eagle grasping a fouled anchor under an ark of 13 stars, is seen on all Marine dress and service uniforms. The design, first adopted for officers uniforms in 1804 (and eventually prescribed for enlisted uniforms in 1822), has remained in continuous use by the Marines with only one minor change being made throughout its history. Originally designed with six pointed stars, around the time of the American Civil War the stars were changed to five points. This device has endured on Marine Corps buttons to the present day, and has the distinction of being the oldest military insignia in continuous use in the United States.



- The 'Marine's Hymn,' was first patented on August 19, 1891. Tradition has it that a Marine that had served in Mexico during the Mexican War wrote the first verses to the hymn by transposing the mottoes on the first Marine flags for poetic license. This unknown writer embraced the history of the Corps in that opening line by praising the taking of Tripoli in the early 1800s coupled with the capture of Mexico City in 1848. The poem was later put to music. The words were slightly changed in the first verse , in 1942, by adding "In the air" to on land and sea.

Optimally a historian's job is to objectively relay historical fact, both good and bad, in a way that will allow the public to form their own views and opinions. Historical facts can not be changed regardless of the point of view. However, the philosophical "truths" of our heritage have a tendency to shift and blur as each successive generation redefines its own image. From it's beginning, in peace and war, the Marine Corps has established a proud history and developed many traditions. Traditions of duty, self sacrifice, versatility, dependability, and loyalty; as well as traditions

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of uniform, insignia, and equipment. Since the American Revolution, generations of Marines have maintained and perpetuated these traditions.

Although, often as an expedient, historical facts may have been blurred and/or myths created in an effort to preserve our history, the ultimate purpose for the establishment of our heritage and traditions is to predicate and reinforce those intangibles that make the Marine Corps (and America) what it is. *Espirit-de-Corps*; Honor, Courage, and Commitment; Pride in ourselves, and pride in our fellow Marines, our unit, and the Corps is instilled in every Marine. The outstanding achievements of the people of the Corps over the past 245 plus years, despite the inevitable human mistakes and blunders, speak for themselves. The bending of facts through legends and traditions to expedite telling the story of the Marine Corps doesn't diminish that significance but acts as an enhancement to those sacrifices and achievements. Although we should each make it a point to know and understand the facts (on any subject), the establishment of traditions to highlight the ethos and intangible ideals established by those Marines of past generations is one of the true purposes of preserving our history.

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