

# MARINE CORPS HISTORY

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# Marine Corps History

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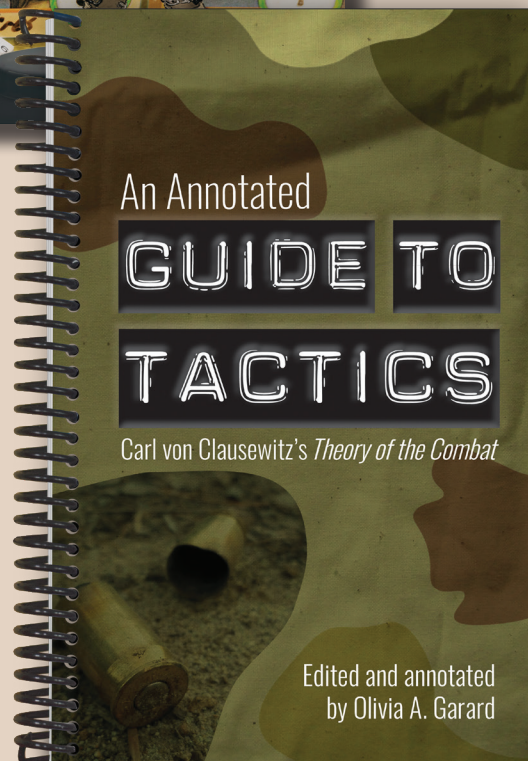
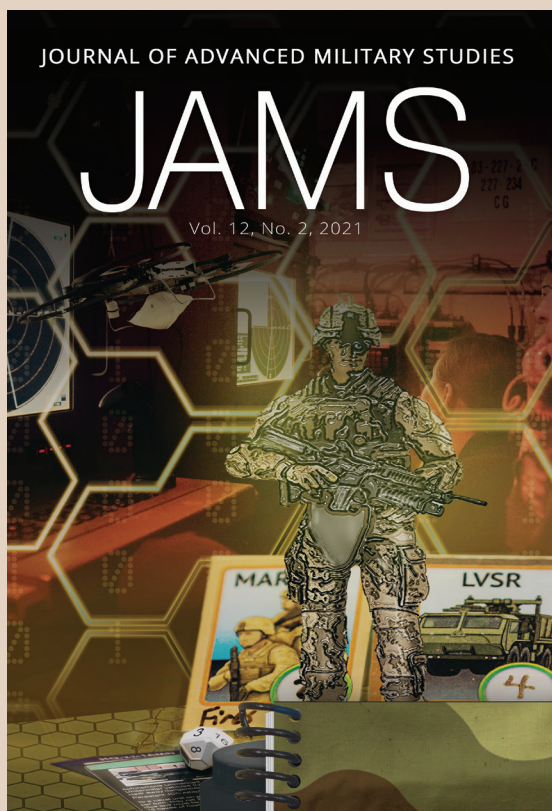
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# MARINE CORPS HISTORY

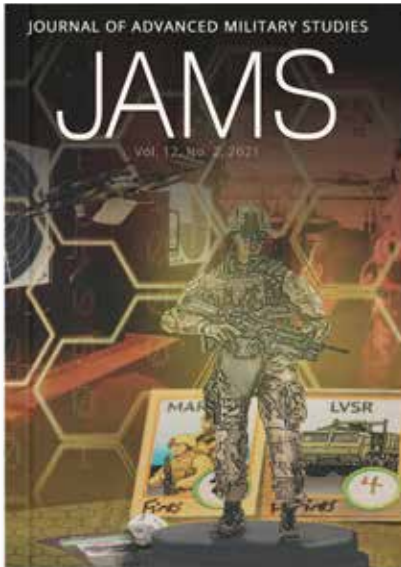
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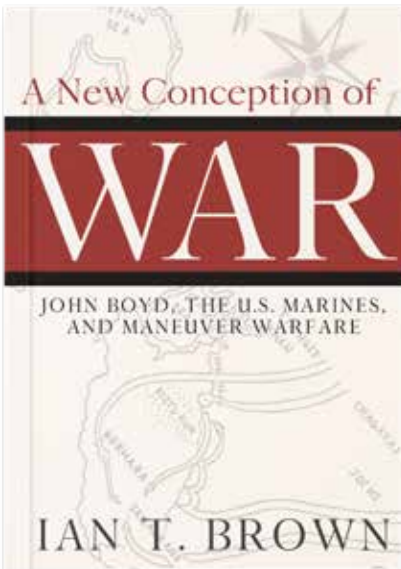
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# FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

Much has happened around the Marine Corps since MCU Press published the Summer 2021 issue of *Marine Corps History*. In July and August, Marines from 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, and 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, helped provide critical security during Operation Allies Refuge, the multinational effort to evacuate as many civilians as possible from Kabul, Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> During that operation, the world witnessed a side of the Corps not often seen in the press or the history books. Images of Marines in full combat gear holding infants and comforting or helping children and families flooded U.S. news and social media spaces. A suicide bomber, however, killed 11 Marines, 1 soldier, 1 Navy corpsman, and nearly 200 Afghan civilians during this final act of a 20-year conflict in Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> Their deaths became all the more tragic because of the very nature of their mission: to protect and save the lives of people fleeing from the Taliban. Their service and ultimate sacrifice, however, ensured the evacuation of 123,000 people.

Faced with new strategic realities and domestic unrest posed by COVID-19 and heightened political division, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen-

eral David H. Berger, continues to plot the course of Marines in his efforts to ready them for future challenges. His 2019 *Commandant's Planning Guidance and Force Design 2030* have already set the Corps down a path once again toward major seaborne operations with the Navy.<sup>3</sup> His recently published *Talent Management 2030*, with its plans for future recruiting and retention, is one of the most progressive documents ever produced by a sitting Commandant.<sup>4</sup> Its full impact has yet to be seen, but its implications and effects will be fodder for historians for generations to come.

Because of its value in shedding light on context, causality, complexity, contingency, and change, *Marine Corps History's* editorial board believes that history is more useful than ever in understanding and coping with the challenges of today. Therefore, we proudly present this new issue in the hope that readers may better inform themselves about the Corps' history and keep abreast of the latest military and naval history scholarship.

The articles presented in this issue fall into two main categories. On the social and cultural side of Marine history, we have Meriwether Ball and William

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<sup>1</sup> "Department of Defense Support in the Continental United States to Operation Allies Refuge," fact sheet, U.S. Northern Command Public Affairs, 29 July 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt, "Witnesses to the End," *New York Times*, 7 November 2021.

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<sup>3</sup> Gen David H. Berger, *Commandant's Planning Guidance: 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2019); and *Force Design 2030* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> *Talent Management 2030* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2021).

J. Brown's "Strategic Communication through Narration: How U.S. Marine Corps Commandants Still Use Story to Inspire Support," and Lauren Bowers's "The 'Devil-May-Care Song of the Leathernecks': A History of the 'Marines' Hymn,' 1920–47." Ball and Brown apply former Marine turned notable communication scholar Walter Fisher's narrative theory to the interviews of three Commandants to show how they used narrative storytelling to unite, inspire, and persuade their audiences. This article also discusses how Fisher's own experiences in the Marine Corps may have helped him develop his theoretical approach. Bowers examines Marine storytelling of a different kind. Her research provides a much-needed exploration of how the "Marines' Hymn" evolved, from generation to generation, in ways that reflect the Corps' history and its institutional development.

On the more traditional side, the next two articles critically examine the combat prowess of Marines in two of the United States' largest wars: the American Civil War and World War I. Michael G. Anderson's "Understanding Battlefield Performance of U.S. Marines Ashore during the Civil War" illustrates that although Marines generally fought bravely and at times heroically, their overall ground combat performance in the Civil War was "lackluster." The author blames poor officer selection, bad recruiting and retention, and limited tactical training and experience. When led by naval officers, Marines performed poorly, he notes. Anderson argues that when incorporated with the Army and placed under experienced leadership, however, their performance improved. James P. Gregory's "A Calamity of Errors: The Untold Story of the 5th Regiment at Blanc Mont Ridge on 4 October 1918" attempts to set the record straight on the Battle of Blanc Mont in 1918. Like nearly all offensives in war, the 4th Brigade's advance at Blanc Mont was not uniformly successful. Gregory recounts the terrible day of 4 October when German machine gunners inflicted 1,097 casualties on the 5th Regiment and forced them into a disorderly retreat. He also reveals how most historians of the Marine Corps, including Edwin N. McClellan, tended to gloss over the event in favor of more successful tales of Marine prowess like Belleau Wood.

Taken together, the articles presented here reflect a healthy range and depth of scholarship that mirrors modern trends in military and naval history. The authors have shown that Marine Corps history is inclusive of all approaches, whether they be combat operations, war and society, cultural, or cross-disciplinary studies. Producing scholarship during a global pandemic, particularly when many archives have curtailed their accessibility, has been a significant challenge for scholars. Thankfully for Marine Corps historians, the Marine Corps History Division's archives staff have worked hard throughout the pandemic to make primary sources available to researchers both digitally and by appointment. Without their knowledge, dedication, and flexibility it would have been much more difficult for authors in this issue to finish their work. For contributing to *Marine Corps History* despite the obstacles brought by COVID-19, the scholars here and archivists that helped them have earned our sincere gratitude.

This issue also contains 12 reviews of important scholarly works in the field of military and naval history. Book reviews are an important and often overlooked aspect of academic history, and the reviewers here have done yeoman's work. The best reviews are clear, concise, fair, and place the book in conversation with other works in their field. Experienced reviewers read critically and judge books on how well the authors achieve their own stated goals. Not all reviews are glowing, as readers will notice here, but they will undoubtedly find them useful regardless.

If the last six months have shown anything, it is that despite the changing landscape of U.S. national security, politics, and culture, the public remains interested in the Marine Corps. Sadly, this interest tends to peak mostly during international crises. It is the Marine Corps' job, however, to be ready for the next one, wherever it may appear. No matter what lies over the horizon, *Marine Corps History* will continue to provide audiences critical examinations of their Marines' past to better our collective understanding of their current place in U.S. history, society, and culture.

# Understanding Battlefield Performance of U.S. Marines Ashore during the Civil War

by Major Michael G. Anderson, USA

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**Abstract:** During the American Civil War, U.S. Marines rarely engaged in land operations and even more rarely conducted land-based or amphibious operations involving more than one company. The Marine Corps' lackluster battlefield performance ashore during the Civil War is best understood by examining their poor organization in officer selection, recruiting and retention, ad hoc formations larger than company size, limited collective tactical training, and experience in large-scale ground combat. The focus of this study is on large-scale Marine land operations, involving battalion-size elements assembled on an ad hoc basis and led by either U.S. Navy officers or U.S. Army officers, to analyze Marines' battlefield performance ashore.

**Keywords:** Civil War, U.S. Marines, large-scale ground combat, ad hoc formations, tactical training, Marine performance ashore

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The U.S. Marine Corps' role in the American Civil War largely followed that of its previous service, lacking much distinction in new roles or tactical application. Marines served primarily in a security role for the U.S. Navy, both guarding shipyards and protecting naval crews from hostile boarding, as well as serving as backup gun crews or as boarding parties and deck sharpshooters during close fighting, while enforcing discipline when afloat. On rare occasions, extremely small-scale and short in

duration and distance, Marines engaged in land operations, and on even rarer occasions they conducted land-based or amphibious operations involving more than one company. The Marine Corps' lackluster battlefield performance ashore during the Civil War is best understood by examining their poor organization in officer selection, recruiting and retention, ad hoc formations larger than company size, limited collective tactical training, and experience in large-scale ground combat. In an overall assessment of Marines' performance ashore, when led by naval officers—as was often the case—Marines performed poorly. However, when incorporated alongside an experienced U.S. Army force, regardless of size or composition, the Marines and their officers' performance notably improved, when compared to fighting alongside an inexperienced Army force.

The focus of this study is on large-scale Marine land operations, involving battalion-size (defined

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Maj Michael G. Anderson, USA, currently attending the U.S. Army's School of Advanced Military Studies, is a graduate of resident U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College. He holds a graduate degree in military history from Norwich University in Vermont and a bachelor's in history and political science from the University of Central Florida in Orlando. Overseas deployments include the Middle East, Afghanistan, and East and Central Africa. The author wishes to thank the peer reviewers for their comments, the editorial team at *Marine Corps History*, and Megan Wood, who helped immensely with reviews of earlier drafts. All combined to make an improved final product. <https://doi.org/10.35318/mch.2021070201>

as multicompany) elements. Ad hoc formations assembled temporarily from ship crews and put ashore for duty is the primary example for the study. While semipermanent battalion-size formations were created, they generally were not deliberately employed in large-scale ground combat. These formations in no way resembled official codified, regimental units common from the twentieth century onward, but rather were collections of Marines from other assignments gathered into a more special-purpose task-organized or provisional type of formation.

The Marine Corps had a minor history of battalion-level land combat operations prior to the American Civil War. After the founding of the Corps in 1775 during the Revolutionary War, Marine battalions fought in the assault on the Bahamas and with General George Washington's army in the battles of Trenton and Princeton, New Jersey. During the War of 1812, a Marine battalion served with distinction at the Battle of Bladensburg (which was otherwise viewed as a fiasco) before the British burned Washington, DC. During the Florida Seminole Wars in 1836, two Marine battalions were attached to the Army for service, and most notably during the Mexican-American War, a Marine battalion served with Major General Winfield Scott's Mexico City campaign in 1847.<sup>1</sup> The Civil War engagements examined in this study include First Battle of Bull Run (21 July 1861), the battles of Honey Hill (30 November 1864) and Tulifinny (6–9 December 1864), and the campaign against Fort Fisher (December 1864–January 1865). These fights exemplify the characteristics of Civil War-era Marine organization, training, employment, and experience from which to draw broader analysis for Marines' battlefield performance ashore. This examination will provide an analytical base for understanding the impacts

of the limited training received on formal, mass infantry tactics and the impact of ad hoc or provisionally organized Marine formations that were haphazardly combined prior to decisive ground combat. The leadership and recruitment challenges the Corps faced during this period further illuminate the impressive record of bravery, heroism, discipline, and determinism of individual and small groups of Marines, even if under a broader lackluster organizational performance ashore.

At the start of the war, the U.S. Navy possessed 90 ships, with 42 of them commissioned naval vessels and only 3 in local waters; the rest were spread abroad. It was a decidedly blue-water Navy at the onset of a war that would demand a brown-water fleet for operations along coastlines, small inlets, and riverways against an enemy possessing no fleet. Within a year of opening hostilities, the U.S. Navy ballooned to 300 ships, and virtually all ships abroad were recalled to take part in the Service's major strategic role of the war: blockading 3,500 miles of Southern coastline. By May 1862, of the nine secessionist major ports, six were captured or closed off; only ports in Charleston, South Carolina; Wilmington, North Carolina; and Mobile, Alabama, remained open. The Navy also rapidly expanded its riverine and small craft force to support its additional role in the U.S. strategy of joint operations with the Army. In this overarching approach, the Marine Corps saw no broad-based, deliberately changed role; its meager expansion only occurred in pace with requirements to fulfill its shipboard duties as the Navy's fleet size increased, typical of its prewar roles and mission.<sup>2</sup>

The Corps' major contribution was largely to serve as backup gun crews, work Navy shipyard garrison duty, and provide security and discipline on ships; however, Marines did participate in small raids, typically led by naval officers for actions such as burning rebel ships, and they fought in combined assaults with the Army in several significant, isolated land engagements and joint coastal operations. During the

<sup>1</sup> For more on the Revolutionary War, see Charles R. Smith, *Marines in the Revolution: A History of the Continental Marines in the American Revolution, 1775–1783* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1975), 51–57, 87–92, 94–105. For more on the War of 1812, see Charles P. Neimeyer, *The Chesapeake Campaign, 1813–1814* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2014), 24, 3, 34, 36–39, 44–45, 49. For more on the Seminole Wars and Mexican-American War, see Gabrielle M. Neufeld Santelli, *Marines in the Mexican War* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1991), 10, 21, 35–47.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Stoker, *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 93–94, 103.



initial days of Southern states' secession, the Marine Corps was used as a rapid reaction force occupying key coastal and waterway defensive fortifications and naval yards. In an early example of joint coastal operations, Marines and sailors, serving in the Chesapeake flotilla, embarked on the Hatteras expedition with Army forces under Major General Benjamin F. Butler intending to take rebel-held Fort Clark and Fort Hatteras to secure the Hatteras Inlet of North Carolina. After landing approximately 300 troops on 29 August 1861, the expedition inexplicably halted in indecision that would later become an unwelcome hallmark of Butler's leadership. However, the 300 soldiers and Marines (gathered from the Marine security details of the USS *Minnesota* [1855 frigate], *Cumberland* [1842 frigate], and *Wabash* [1855 screw frigate]) continued. While Fort Clark was found evacuated, the more-impressive and -defensible Fort Hatteras remained fully manned. The following morning, after a miserable night in the rain outside the ramparts, Butler's force was rewarded by a stray lightning strike igniting the Fort Hatteras magazine, resulting in the garrison's rapid surrender and resolving the expedition successfully without a true battlefield test of the joint force on land.<sup>3</sup>

While these garrison and security duties and small-scale raids typified the Corps' usage ashore during the war, they were not the only land combat Marines experienced, nor are they the focus of this study. A brief examination of Marine combat in multicompany, battalion-size land and coastal operations follows to better understand the factors of Marine performance in large-scale land combat operations and their results.

## Experiences

Examining the major land combat operations Marines participated in chronologically assists in identifying commonalities in battlefield performance factors and analyzing them. A grounded foundation in the status of the Marine Corps at the opening of hostilities and then the evolution of its involvement in land-based

combat is an important foundation from which to begin any examination. The prewar strength of the Corps rested at around 1,800 Marines. Compared to its contemporary land-based service, it was 10 percent of the Army's size and only 20 percent of the Navy's.<sup>4</sup> The Corps' adjutant inspector report from 2 November 1860 listed its strength at 1,775 Marines, with 63 officers, 252 noncommissioned officers (NCOs), 113 musicians, and 1,347 privates. At the outbreak of the war, two-thirds of these Marines were serving on naval ships spread across the seas. As the Corps rapidly expanded with the looming war, recruitment barely filled more than half the new enlistments needed to support just the new Navy ships commissioning, much less provide for a large Marine land combat-centric force. Sea duty was definitively the priority for the Marine Corps with the able-bodied, experienced, and reliable sergeants and Marines first going to the ships, then to the Marine barracks, and finally, to any joint expeditions with the Army.<sup>5</sup>

A letter from Private J. Ferris Shoemaker to his brother adequately explained the Marine Corps' organizational structure:

There is no such thing in the Marine Corps as an organized company. We are all one company . . . divided into nominal companies so as to have some regularity in our movements. . . . When a squad is wanted to put on a ship as guard, the number is chosen from the whole number in the Barracks, so you see that I am just as likely to be sent off alone as with my old acquaintances.<sup>6</sup>

This illuminates a key factor in the struggles of large-scale land combat for Marines: haphazard and temporary organization. Although there were a few

<sup>4</sup> Gerald S. Henig, "Marines Fighting Marines: The Battle of Drewry's Bluff," *Naval History Magazine* 23, no. 3 (June 2009).

<sup>5</sup> "Report of the Secretary of the Navy," in *Message from the President of the United States to the Two Houses of Congress at the Commencement of the Second Session of the Thirty-sixth Congress*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: George W. Bowman, 1860), 382–85.

<sup>6</sup> As quoted in David M. Sullivan, *The United States Marine Corps in the Civil War—The Second Year* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing, 1997), 211, hereafter Sullivan, *The Second Year*.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard C. Nalty, *United States Marines at Harper's Ferry and in the Civil War* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1983), 21, 9–11.

examples of battalion- and company-size Marine formations drilling, training, and staying together for use as a cohesive unit, it was rare, and it was even rarer for these special-purpose task-organized formations to be employed, even when formed. Most Marines' large-scale land combat experience in the Civil War came from the ad hoc formations cobbled together from the Marine guard detachments on nearby Navy ships. Of note, Marines were not the only ones who found themselves used in a manner for which they were not organized, trained, or designed; some soldiers experienced "marine" duties, as exemplified by three Army infantry regiments who provided "marines" to the Mississippi Squadron courtesy of Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant. These soldiers received commendations from Rear Admiral David D. Porter, who wrote of "their good conduct, bravery in action, and attention to their duties. . . . I . . . deem myself fortunate in having had detailed for the squadron, so brave and efficient a party of men. . . . I take pleasure in paying this just tribute to them, and hope they will continue to merit approval, as they have hitherto done."<sup>7</sup> Commander James P. Foster also praised these soldier-marines stating, "The officers and the other gun's crew, and the marines acted their part bravely, without exception."<sup>8</sup>

### ***First Battle of Bull Run, 21 July 1861***

The first time Marines found themselves pressed into large-scale land combat during the Civil War was the First Battle of Bull Run. It was one of the Corps' largest organized organic contributions to land combat during the war. The Corps sent a full battalion of 12 officers and 336 enlisted, led by Major John G. Reynolds, to support Army captain Charles Griffin's artillery battery.<sup>9</sup> The order for Marine participation at Bull Run stated, "You will be pleased to detail from the barracks four companies of eighty men each, the whole under command of Major Reynolds . . . for tem-

porary field service under Brig. General [Irvin] McDowell, to whom Major Reynolds will report."<sup>10</sup> The Marine Corps was last in priority for new equipment when the war broke out. Instead of the requested new rifled muskets, the Marines received passed-down smoothbore muskets from the War Department. Only six of the Marine officers present at Bull Run had any combat experience. Only seven privates had been in the Corps before the firing on Fort Sumter; some had less than a week's training before Bull Run.<sup>11</sup>

A letter from Lieutenant Robert E. Hitchcock to his parents provides details on the Marine battalion's participation at First Bull Run.

So tomorrow morning will see me and five other Lieuts. With 300 Marines (raw recruits in every sense of the term) on our way to Fairfax Court House to take part in a bloody battle. . . . This is unexpected of us and the Marines are not fit to go into the field, for every man of them is as raw as you please, not more than a hundred of them have been here over three weeks. We have no camp equipage of any kind, not even tents, and after all this, we are expected to take the brunt of the battle. . . . We shall do as well as we can under the circumstances; just think of it, 300 raw men in the field! We shall drill all day, and work hard.<sup>12</sup>

At every halt along the march, during the day in camp and each night for two days leading up to the battle, Major Reynolds drilled his ad hoc Marine battalion; it was all he could do.<sup>13</sup> The Marines were assigned to support Army artillery batteries, and the dismounted Marines struggled to keep up with the mounted artillery's pace on the 26 miles (42 kilometers) from Washington, DC, to Manassas, Virginia. After three days

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in David M. Sullivan, *The United States Marine Corps in the Civil War—The Third Year* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing, 1998), 107, hereafter Sullivan, *The Third Year*.

<sup>8</sup> As quoted in Sullivan, *The Third Year*, 106.

<sup>9</sup> Nalty, *United States Marines at Harpers Ferry*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> David M. Sullivan, *The United States Marine Corps in the Civil War—The First Year* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing, 1997), 116, hereafter Sullivan, *The First Year*.

<sup>11</sup> Sullivan, *The First Year*, 102, 120–21.

<sup>12</sup> As quoted in Sullivan, *The First Year*, 116–17.

<sup>13</sup> Sullivan, *The First Year*, 123–25.

of rest in Manassas, on 21 July, Major Reynolds and Captain Griffin pushed forward late in the morning to join the fight unfolding at Bull Run.<sup>14</sup>

The Marines followed the Army batteries as they pushed forward at 1400 to the high ground. Once on Henry Hill, the Marines experienced their first Civil War combat as they jogged to keep up with the horse-drawn artillery. After arriving on the hill, the Marines were made to rest behind the guns. In the confusion of the fight, enemy infantry was mistaken by some Army officers as friendly troops as they approached. Confusion ended when the infantry unleashed a devastating volley into the artillery and Marines. Three times the Marines wavered and Major Reynolds rallied them, displaying individual bravery and professionalism. Even so, the Army infantry accompanying the Marines and artillery broke under the fire and threat of enemy cavalry. The Marines attempted to resist, but enemy fire and the disorder of mixed troops caused their lines to break and they fell back down the hill.<sup>15</sup>

The Marines suffered comparatively fewer casualties than the leading Army brigades—reportedly as few as three—when they first left the concealment of woods and took their place behind the battery. Army brigadier general Andrew Porter positively noted of the Marines' conduct that "through constant exertions of their officers [they] had been brought to a fine military appearance."<sup>16</sup> In a second attempt to advance up Henry Hill to regain the high ground and abandoned artillery, the Marine officers rallied the stragglers and joined with the 14th Brooklyn (properly, 84th New York Volunteers) as it entered the fight. With concentrated enemy fire, the Marines and 14th Brooklyn infantry discipline cracked again, retreating back down the hill in disorder as the officers attempted to stop them.<sup>17</sup> After the second break, the enemy started to pursue the retreating U.S. forces. Rebel surgeon Daniel M. Conrad noted, "The green pines were filled with the 79th Highlanders [New York Infantry Regiment]

and the red-breeched Brooklyn Zouaves [5th New York Infantry], but the only men that were killed and wounded twenty or thirty yards behind and in the rear of our lines were the United States Marines."<sup>18</sup> While much is made of this statement, its context is largely lost; it implies broad assumptions made by an enemy medical officer post-battle on observed locations of bodies of the Marines.

The retreating Marines gathered at the crossroads at the foot of Henry Hill with a chaotic mix of U.S. infantry brigades. They reformed with the 14th Brooklyn before attempting to advance again. However, more retreating U.S. troops collided with the reorganizing mass, and in the midst of the Marines' third attempt to secure Henry Hill, they were pushed back by a determined enemy advance and pulled into the general U.S. retreat. A portion of the Marine battalion formed part of the rear guard as the U.S. forces retreated in abject disorder and panic. Once relieved by another New York militia unit, the Marines all joined the disjointed retreating mass back to Washington. During the retreat, the Marines lost all sense of order, with officers separated from their troops.<sup>19</sup> During the disorganized rout, the Marines tossed aside all manner of equipment and gear that had been so difficult to procure prior to the fight, including muskets, cartridge boxes, canteens, and blankets. On 24 July, Colonel Harris requested the Marine battalion be detached from service with the Army and returned to their traditional duties. His request was granted immediately.<sup>20</sup> Days after the battle, Marine lieutenant William H. Carter wrote home to his mother, "We lost one Officer Lieut. Hitchcock and two wounded, and 30 men and got licked awfully. We have got to do better than we did at Bull Run or we will be defeated at all times."<sup>21</sup>

Even in light of this disastrous experience, the Marine Corps Commandant continued to receive willing and ardently patriotic Marines soliciting to participate ashore. Importantly, shipboard Marines

<sup>14</sup> *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, series 1, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901), 383–85, 391.

<sup>15</sup> *The War of the Rebellion*, series 1, vol. 2, 385, 392.

<sup>16</sup> *The War of the Rebellion*, series 1, vol. 2, 383.

<sup>17</sup> Sullivan, *The First Year*, 138–39.

<sup>18</sup> As quoted in Sullivan, *The First Year*, 139–40.

<sup>19</sup> Sullivan, *The First Year*, 141–42, 144.

<sup>20</sup> Sullivan, *The First Year*, 145, 151.

<sup>21</sup> As quoted in Sullivan, *The First Year*, 146.

who had conducted ground infantry tactical drill petitioned Colonel Harris to go ashore to participate with the Army, one writing of his men on the USS *Macedonian* (1836 frigate) that “they are well instructed in Light Inf. Tactics and the drill for Skirmishers which they have practiced on shore at Vera Cruz. . . . I most earnestly ask that you will not refuse me this opportunity of serving my country in a more useful manner than at present and in the position of a true soldier, in the field.” Similarly, a group of Marine veterans of the recent Mexican-American War and frontier conflicts serving aboard the USS *Richmond* (1860 steam sloop) wrote a group letter stating: “Understanding that a Marine Battalion has gone into the field, we earnestly and respectfully request that we may be allowed to join it . . . having been in the field before in Mexico and Indian Wars and prefer active service. There are a number of recruits in the Barracks who would willingly take our place on board ship and do ship duty equally well.”<sup>22</sup> They could not have known that a long war had just begun and that Marines would have many more opportunities to serve their country. The Bull Run engagement reflected largely on inexperience and lack of training and preparedness for combat of both officers and enlisted, alongside the deprioritization of weaponry for the Marines with their smoothbore muskets, resulting in poor equipping. Even so, the action highlighted inherent Marine steadfastness in its leadership and devotion to sacrifice among the rank-and-file even amidst the overall inexperience and failed execution.

### ***Assault on Fort Sumter, 8 September 1863***

It was nearly two years before the next major operation was conducted by a multicompany Marine formation fighting ashore. In fall 1863, Admiral John A. Dahlgren undertook an expedition to retake Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor using a provisional Marine battalion that had been unable to participate in the Army’s Battery Wagner operations earlier that year. The battalion was a semipermanent, not for-

mally designated or organized, formation of detached Marines from various garrison and ship duty. Whereas most Marine battalions ashore during the war came from expediently formed battalions from nearby Navy squadrons for immediate action and once complete returned to their ships, this was an example of a battalion formed for extended duty of detached Marines from various duties around the United States, not just the immediately colocated Navy squadron. Marine officers John G. Reynolds and Jacob W. Zeilin experimented with this type of semipermanent Marine battalion for combat ashore, contributing their previous experience at Bull Run to these formations. However, few of this type of battalion were ever employed; in fact, both officers served in such a battalion earlier in the war, under Rear Admiral Samuel Francis DuPont, that was never employed before its disbandment.<sup>23</sup> Reynolds and Zeilin, arguably the most experienced of the Marines in large-scale combat ashore, now found themselves involved in the latest manifestation of this experimental formation under Dahlgren. To do this, Dahlgren called on the formation of the Marine battalion at their base in Port Royal, South Carolina, under Major Zeilin. Zeilin responded to Dahlgren’s request for Marine battalion volunteers for the operations against Fort Sumter: “I can not [*sic*] say whether they are such as you require or not, but they are the best I have.”<sup>24</sup> Zeilin’s faith in his Marines’ training and abilities for such a joint amphibious venture was wanting. Perhaps this moroseness was also attached to Zeilin’s personal state, as he fell sick and was ordered back to Washington to be replaced by now-lieutenant colonel Reynolds. Until Reynolds’s arrival, another Bull Run veteran, the senior shipboard Marine commander, Captain E. McDonald Reynolds, replaced Zeilin to lead the battalion. On 8 September, Captain Reynolds organized his force into three ad hoc companies and loaded them into small boats along with sailors, intending to conduct a complex nighttime assault. The rebels, having secured copies of

<sup>22</sup> The second USS *Macedonian* was built on the keel of the first ship of the same name. As quoted in Sullivan, *The First Year*, 152–53.

<sup>23</sup> *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies on the War of the Rebellion*, series 1, vol. 12 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1902), 223, 233, 235–36, 658–59, hereafter *ORN*.

<sup>24</sup> *ORN*, series 1, vol. 14, 518.

the U.S. signal code books, read the signals and anticipated the pending assault on Fort Sumter. The intercepted signals were also confirmed by observations of the congregating small boats in the harbor before the attack. Rockets fired by the fort's defenders lit up the clear sky and lanterns and lights illuminated the confused and chaotic boats in their approach to Sumter. The U.S. Marines and sailors valiantly fired back but the enemy's concentrated fire overwhelmed them.<sup>25</sup>

The resulting assault was a chaotic, uncoordinated, tragic disaster for the Marines. In the darkness and silence required of surprise at night, some Marine officers did not even know if any boats made it to Fort Sumter; others were unsure if the attack was even still planned. By the time the assault was terminated and the Marines withdrew, most boats were still lost and aimlessly drifting around the base of Fort Sumter. Meanwhile, 20 Marines under Lieutenant Percival C. Pope had landed. Such a small force, separated from any support and in confusion, was easily repelled by rebels along Sumter's parapets. In these disparate and scattered small groups, some landings such as Pope's were made disjointedly by nearly half the attacking force, about 90–100 men. Eleven of the 25 boats landed on Fort Sumter. U.S. losses included 4 killed, 20 wounded, and 106 prisoners, 11 of which were officers. Forty-four casualties total were from the Marine battalion.<sup>26</sup>

The attack failed in 20 furious minutes. U.S. forces lacked knowledge of Fort Sumter's outer and inner works or landing points and were unable to scale the fort's walls. Participants bemoaned a lack of time to properly organize and train the ad hoc landing force and the inability to withstand a counterattack or the enemy land batteries had Fort Sumter been successfully seized. On 27 November 1863, the remnants of the Marine battalion held a review and departed north to be broken up and fill the ranks of Marine guard detachments on the northern squadron ships, but not before Dahlgren first filled his squadron's

shipboard vacancies with the disbanding Marines.<sup>27</sup> While the attempted assault on Fort Sumter was an unmitigated disaster for the participating Marines and sailors, it was not a reflection on them but rather on an overly complex plan that was executed in a difficult environment at night against a prepared enemy, which negated the critical component of surprise. Lack of rehearsals stands out as one of the operation's key faults that can be directly held against Marine and Navy leadership. Even so, the assault likely would have failed regardless, though it may possibly have been less costly had they been better prepared, coordinated, and trained.

This experiment with a provisional Marine battalion organized, trained, and designed for organic multicompartment maneuvers ashore was disbanded, with its forces broken up again and spread out among the fleet to support the Navy ships, signaling a return to the previous methodology of creating ad hoc formations of Marines for large-scale service ashore by combining various elements from ship detachments for a particular operation. The United States returned to a methodology that had not worked out very well before only to try it again at one of the largest joint Marine-Army operations of the war in the support of Major General William T. Sherman's southern campaign.

### ***Honey Hill, 30 November–1 December 1864, and Tulifinny Crossroads, 6 December 1864***

Sherman's expedition to sever the railroad between Charleston and Savannah saw an entire Marine battalion-size force fight alongside the Army. Marine lieutenant George G. Stoddard led the battalion as part of a fleet brigade, so called because the Marines came from the offshore Navy squadron, supporting the Army troops. On 29 November, the combined force landed at Boyd's Neck, South Carolina. This 493-man fleet brigade comprised a naval artillery battalion, a naval infantry battalion, and the Marine bat-

<sup>25</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 14, 622–26, 628–30, 633–34; and Thomas H. Stevens, "The Boat Attack on Sumter," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War: Retreat with Honor*, vol. 4 (Secaucus, NJ: Castle, 1983), 49–51.

<sup>26</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 14, 622–26, 628–30, 633–34; and Sullivan, *The Third Year*, 71, 76–77, 80, 86.

<sup>27</sup> John Johnson, "The Confederate Defense of Fort Sumter," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War: Retreat with Honor*, 26; Stevens, "The Boat Attack on Sumter," 49; and ORN, series 1, vol. 15, 104.

talion, each making up about one-third of the force.<sup>28</sup> On 1 December, they engaged the first significant rebel resistance at Honey Hill. Fighting through the swampy terrain, the Marines held their line under intense firing until midafternoon. As the day waned, the joint U.S. forces fell back as a whole. During the fighting at Honey Hill, which some reports indicated lasted six to seven hours, the Marine battalion's performance equaled that of the other Army regiments. The Marines fought mostly along the expedition's flank, first with the 127th New York Infantry Regiment during the initial contact but mostly integrated with the largely African-American units on the right of the U.S. lines. Low on ammunition, the U.S. forces retreated under cover of darkness.<sup>29</sup> Commander George H. Preble, overall commander of Dahlgren's fleet brigade, reported, "Considering that marines were taken from the vessels of the squadron, scattered on the blockade, and had been formed into a battalion only two days previous, and that all the commanding officers were sergeants, I think their conduct creditable to the Corps."<sup>30</sup>

Five days after the fighting at Honey Hill, the expedition tried again, pushing toward Tulifinny Crossroads, only a kilometer or so from the railroad they were attempting to cut. The rebels beat back the U.S. attempt again. After the Marines fell back, they entrenched with hasty earthworks. On 9 December, the United States made a final attempt to cut the supply lines from Charleston to Savannah, this time not by tearing up the railroads but by shelling the railroads with long-range artillery. The Marines moved through the waist-deep swamp along with the Army infantry and sailors to fight through the enemy lines just far enough to clear a path for the artillery to be able to range the railroad. The ad hoc fleet brigade of sailors and Marines again held their own equal to the infantry. At Tulifinny, the Marines nestled into the main U.S. line, fully incorporated into the Army formation with New York regiments on either side of them, mutually supportive. This placement among

the Army infantry perhaps served as an inspiration and an example for the inexperienced Marine battalion.<sup>31</sup> The Marines made it within 50 yards of the enemy line before they opened fire as they emerged from the swamp. As the artillery fired, confusion reigned, and the U.S. ground forces began retreating, but the Marines never received the order to fall back and naturally continued to press their advance. As the Marines belatedly realized what was happening, the rebels were advancing from their works in an attempt to cut them off. Stoddard led his Marines deeper into the swamp, avoiding the pursuing rebel infantry and heading toward the river. Using the Tulifinny River as a guide, Stoddard led his Marines back along the riverbank, dodging multiple enemy patrols until he reached the U.S. lines. The 9 December attempt to destroy the railroad by artillery was the final effort. Poor weather conditions terminated the operation by the end of the month.<sup>32</sup>

The Army's coast division, commanded by Brigadier General John P. Hatch, praised the fleet brigade when he departed the region after the Honey Hill and Tulifinny River battles, messaging "to the brigade that its gallantry in action and good conduct . . . won from all the land forces with which it served the highest praises . . . if any jealousy had previously existed between the different branches . . . all that was wanting was a chance to efface it as a better knowledge of each other."<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Hatch's brigade commanders complimented the ad hoc naval force. Brigadier General Edward E. Potter wrote, "In the sharply contested affair of Dec. 6th, Marines and battalion of Sailor Infantry . . . bore a conspicuous part. I had every opportunity to observe the gallantry of your command in the field." The department commander, Major General John G. Foster wrote, "At the Battle of Honey Hill, and the engagements upon Devaux's Neck [South Carolina] . . . your force aided in a great degree to ensure our success, and were in fact, under

<sup>28</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 16, 111.

<sup>29</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 16, 74, 76–81.

<sup>30</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 16, 77.

<sup>31</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 16, 81–90.

<sup>32</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 16, 99–102.

<sup>33</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 16, 109.

the circumstances, invaluable.”<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, though largely a failure, the expedition of Honey Hill and Tullifinny exemplified one of the war’s best cases of joint operations between the Marines and the Army and one of the Marines’ best performances fighting ashore in large-scale ground combat. Placing the Marine formation among more experienced Army units likely contributed to this performance. The Marine officers demonstrated distinctive, strong leadership and the rank-and-file displayed determination and bravery while under fire. Without adopting some of these practices, the next large-scale joint operation against Fort Fisher faced critical flaws in its organization and execution in its distinct delineation and coordination between the naval forces on land and the Army efforts.

### ***Fort Fisher, 25–27 December 1864 and 13–14 January 1865***

Naval strategy and shoreline operations have been asserted to be a critical part of the U.S. strategy to win the war by pressuring the rebel states on every side, and the campaign against Fort Fisher on the North Carolina coast, protecting one of the last blockade-running harbors of the rebellion, contributes significantly to this narrative. Part of the strategy resulted in the rebels being forced to spread thin, protecting the entire shoreline from U.S. attack, which concurrently reduced the Southern field armies. The secessionists adopted a “cordon strategy defense,” intending to protect all their newly declared confederacy at once and attempting to defend their source of recruitment and supply, demonstrate their claim to sovereignty, and preserve slavery. This cordon approach—perimeter defense—caused the dispersal of forces by necessity.<sup>35</sup> The sealing of Southern shorelines and ports reduced rebel access to materiel and equipment needed for the war from foreign markets. To seize Fort Fisher entailed a large amphibious effort combining naval assets (including landing Marines) with Army units. By December 1864, the

waterway and coastal pressures of U.S. operations reduced remaining major Southern deep-sea ports to two: Wilmington, North Carolina, and Charleston, South Carolina. As previously examined, Charleston Harbor remained defiantly rebellious even after amphibious efforts against Fort Sumter and land-based operations along the various islands and inlets around the major port city. Wilmington then became the U.S. military’s next target.<sup>36</sup>

Although only one of two forts that controlled entrance up the Cape Fear River to the Wilmington port, Fort Fisher was the key to the defense of Wilmington, and arguably one of the most advanced fortifications of the time. Largely due to the efforts of Fort Fisher’s commander Colonel William Lamb and Major General William Henry Chase Whiting’s continual efforts, the layout and defenses of the fort were impressive. Fort Fisher possessed nearly 4,000-foot-long walls, forming a numeral seven with the top line stretching horizontally for nearly 1,000 feet across the peninsula known as Confederate Point, choking the entrance of the Cape Fear River. The longer vertical line reached down parallel to the peninsula for nearly 3,000 feet. The top line of the fort protected Fort Fisher against land attack from up the peninsula while the vertical line faced the sea. An attack from the rear of the fort’s unprotected side was unlikely since attack from that direction would require the attackers to pass the fort into New Inlet. Separate from the fort proper was a self-contained redoubt, a purpose-built fallback point and ferrying site for potential replacements called Battery Buchanan. It was meant to be Fort Fisher’s last stand.<sup>37</sup>

Fort Fisher’s defenses included a minefield, infantry behind log and earth palisades overlooking open approaches, and a 23-foot rampart supported by 24 guns and mortars, with a garrison of 1,000 total infantry, engineers, and artillerymen. The traverses forming the bulk of the fort’s outer wall structure

<sup>34</sup> As quoted in David M. Sullivan, *The United States Marine Corps in the Civil War—The Final Year* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing, 2000), 105.

<sup>35</sup> Stoker, *The Grand Design*, 19, 26.

<sup>36</sup> Gary J. Ohls, “Fort Fisher: Amphibious Victory in the American Civil War,” *Naval War College Review* 59, no. 4 (Autumn 2006): 82–84.

<sup>37</sup> Ohls, “Fort Fisher,” 85–86; *The War of the Rebellion*, series 1, vol. 46, part 2, 60, 67; and William Lamb, “The Defense of Fort Fisher,” in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War: Retreat with Honor*, vol. 4, 643.

were nearly self-contained mounds, linking the various cannons. The seaside structures were half the size of the land-facing ones, since they were largely built to survive ricochet shots skipping off the water from a naval bombardment, not a land assault from the water's edge. The palisade stretched in front of the land face of the fort 50 feet across the beach to the water's edge, 20 feet high and 25 feet thick on a 45-degree slope, and was topped with marshy grass. It was made of sharpened wooden stakes nine feet tall. Fort Fisher's palisade was 20 yards from the base of the earthworks. Although the arrival of Major General Robert F. Hoke's division from Virginia to support the defense of Wilmington remained significant, they remained too far north around Wilmington, limiting their impact to the Fort Fisher defense.<sup>38</sup>

In December 1864, Grant tasked Butler's Army of the James to reduce Fort Fisher to close Wilmington's port with naval commander David D. Porter, who led the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron in support. Working with Porter, Grant's plan involved moving 6,500 soldiers from Bermuda Hundred, a portion of land enclosed by the James River in Virginia, down to North Carolina close enough to take action against Fort Fisher. After Porter's naval bombardment weakened the defenses, Butler's soldiers under local command of Brigadier General Godfrey Weitzel would storm the fort.

Disjointed coordination of support from Porter's ships led to an intermittent and largely ineffectual naval bombardment. A cautious Weitzel halted within 800 yards of the fort with only half of his landing force ashore—around 3,000 soldiers—after skirmishers met resistance 500 yards from the base. An indecisive Weitzel met with an exceedingly cautious Butler, who had unexpectedly decided to accompany the expedition personally. The landing force suddenly re-embarked as a result of this meeting and the assault

on Fisher was called off after 48 hours of standoff without even an attempt to storm the fort.<sup>39</sup>

The failed 25–27 December 1864 first Battle of Fort Fisher led to another attempt when a determined Grant fired Butler and emphatically ordered Major General Alfred H. Terry, with Porter in support again, to take Fisher and choke off Wilmington. On 13 January, the second battle began with Terry leading the land element and Porter still in command of the seaborne forces. At 0800, the Navy began its bombardment and from 0830 to 1400 they landed 8,000 troops north of the fort, including Porter's ad hoc assembled naval brigade of sailors and Marines from his naval squadron crews offshore. The Naval Brigade comprised 1,600 sailors with 400 Marines from elements of 35 of the fleet's 60 ships. The sailors and Marines were grouped into three divisions according to how the ships were organized within the fleet. Each division was to be supported by a Marine company led by a junior officer to provide supporting fire to the bulk Navy sailor assaulters.<sup>40</sup>

Porter's orders on 4 January for the Naval Brigade's assault read

That we may have a share in the assault when it takes place. . . . The sailors will be armed with cutlasses, well sharpened, and with revolvers. . . . The Marines will form in the rear and cover the sailors. While the soldiers are going over the parapets in the front, the sailors will take the sea face. . . . We can land 2,000 men from the fleet and not feel it. Two thousand active men from the fleet will carry the day.<sup>41</sup>

Additionally, Porter's 15 January orders for the landing force further specified the role of the Marines: "No move is to be made forward until the army charges, when the navy is to assault the sea . . . going over with

<sup>38</sup> Charles M. Robinson III, *Hurricane of Fire: The Union Assault on Fort Fisher* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 66; Lamb, "The Defense of Fort Fisher," 643; and *The War of the Rebellion*, series 1, vol. 46, part 1, 407–8.

<sup>39</sup> Ohls, "Fort Fisher: Amphibious Victory," 86–88.

<sup>40</sup> *The War of the Rebellion*, series 1, vol. 46, part 1, 405–6 and series 1, vol. 46, part 2, 128–29; and Thomas O. Selfridge Jr., "The Navy at Fort Fisher," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War: Retreat with Honor*, vol. 4, 659.

<sup>41</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 11, 427.



cutlasses drawn and revolvers in hand. The Marine will follow after.<sup>42</sup> This contributed to part of Porter's plan involving the Marines seizing the parapets, firing inside at the defenders while the sailors penetrated the ramparts and attacked the defenders in close combat, explaining the armament of pistols and cutlasses.

Terry divided his force to block Hoke's forces, positioned closer to Wilmington to the north, while he pivoted the rest to assault Fort Fisher by land. By 0800 on 14 January, Terry was prepared to focus on the assault. The ad hoc naval brigade was armed with swords, pistols, carbines, and rifles and was commanded by Lieutenant Commander Kidder Randolph Breese. Though not officially under Terry's command, this naval amphibious force formed the left flank of his advance. Navy lieutenant George Dewey commented on the choice of weapons, stating they "evidently were chosen with the idea that storming the face of the strongest work in the civil war was the same sort of operation as boarding a frigate in 1812."<sup>43</sup>

By 1100 on 15 January, Porter's command initiated preparatory fires on the fort. Although meant to be in place by 1400, Terry's land forces took extra time getting into final assault positions and at 1500 signaled to the fleet to shift its fires as his two-pronged assault kicked off. The Army forces made better progress while the naval brigade on the left faced the bulk of the rebel forces, who had mistakenly identified it as the main effort. The naval gunfire destroyed all the enemy guns along the north wall facing the land force, destroyed the palisade, and churned the minefield, assisting the assault. Fort Fisher's commander noted succinctly that with practice from the failed assault, the U.S. Navy's gunnery had improved.<sup>44</sup>

Modifying the original plan, the Marines were placed in rifle pits to support the sailors' charge. Captain Dawson's Marines were pressed forward before they could be fully organized after the landing. He reported, "I had to move off without time to equalize companies, to number them off for facing and march-

ing; to select sergeants to replace officers, or post the guides of a single company or platoon."<sup>45</sup> The Marine forces divided into two detachments under Lieutenant Louis E. Fagan and Captain Lucien L. Dawson. However, Breese's altered plan, ordering the Marines from the freshly dug rifle pits onto the beach with the sailors, jumbled Marines together with the sailors or further divided detachments as Marine officers tried to control them in the growing mass of bodies.<sup>46</sup>

The sailors formed up into three waves, but miscommunication forced them up to the left of the Marines instead of going through them. Confusion also led to uncertainty in coordinating with the Army assault. The naval brigade's courier received advice from the lead Army brigade commander as he coordinated the assault on the beach, telling him the naval force was "too compactly formed—your front is too narrow for the depth of your column. To go into action as your men are now formed places you under a great disadvantage. . . . If you go forward as you are you will be fearfully punished . . . the only good your column will do will be to receive the fire which otherwise would come to our lines."<sup>47</sup> His experienced warning was rebuffed and went unheeded. Further issue arose when Captain Dawson thought he had been ordered to join the assault, leaving only Fagan's detachment to provide the covering fire from the rifle pits to the assault. Though supported as best as Fagan's Marines could, the naval brigade assault failed to breach Fort Fisher's walls.<sup>48</sup>

The naval brigade tried multiple unsuccessful charges, taking brutal fire from the ramparts. Unable to breach the fort, its attacks failed. The sand was ankle deep, slowing down any quick movement, and their blue uniforms made the sailors stand out against the white sands. A seaman stated, "I never saw men fall so fast in my life. I cannot Describe it with pen and paper."<sup>49</sup> The shifted naval brigade ended up charging toward the northeast bastion of Fort Fisher

<sup>42</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 11, 429–30.

<sup>43</sup> As quoted in Robinson, *Hurricane of Fire*, 148.

<sup>44</sup> *The War of the Rebellion*, series 1, vol. 46, part 1, 396–97; and Lamb, "The Defense of Fort Fisher," 647, 649.

<sup>45</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 11, 576.

<sup>46</sup> Sullivan, *The Final Year*, 179.

<sup>47</sup> As quoted in Robinson, *Hurricane of Fire*, 162.

<sup>48</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 11, 576–84.

<sup>49</sup> As quoted in Robinson, *Hurricane of Fire*, 166.

near the stretch of the palisades between the fort's embankments and the ocean, the strongest portion of the fort.<sup>50</sup>

In the excitement of the attack, the officers migrated to the front of the mixed column as it stalled against the palisade, leaving the bulk of the divisions behind leaderless. The inexperienced naval force stacked up into one chaotic mass under the enemy fire, as the three divisions—each separated by their attached Marine companies—became comingled. Once huddled against the palisade and under the murderous enemy fire, the sailors could not find a way in, as they lacked proper equipment to dismantle the massive wooden stakes. The renewed naval bombardment meant to support the Army's assault trapped the remaining sailors and Marines against the palisades for fear of being killed by their own ships' guns.<sup>51</sup>

In the confusion, many Marines got carried away and followed the sailors toward the fort, ending up trapped with them at the palisade or repulsed back to the beach, while Dawson held on to some Marines and attempted to provide supporting fire until sunset from the slope between the beach and the fort.<sup>52</sup> Lamb wrote, "The heroic bravery of officers . . . could not restrain the men from panic and retreat . . . we witnessed what had never been seen before, a disorderly rout of American sailors and marines."<sup>53</sup>

Dawson collected two companies of Marines to answer a request from Terry for forces to occupy the right of his lines to free up some of his own regiments to add to the Army's assault. Around 1800, Terry's infantry breached Fort Fisher. As it grew dark, the remaining Marines and sailors huddled against the palisades drifted back up the beach in small groups as the rising tide started washing over the dead and wounded. After the final naval charge was repulsed, the remnants of the naval brigade not trapped against the palisade regrouped and joined Dawson's Marines manning the defensive works covering the Army's rear. As Terry intended, this allowed fresh Army in-

fantry regiments to redeploy, reinforcing the foothold inside Fort Fisher. By midnight, Fort Fisher capitulated, with all the defenders killed, wounded, or captured; both enemy leaders, Whiting and Lamb, were seriously wounded and captured. Terry, in his official report, stated, "The assault of the sailors and marines, although it failed, undoubtedly contributed somewhat to our success."<sup>54</sup> Navy officers and even the defenders agreed. One of the Navy division commanders of the naval brigade placed no blame for the assault's failure on the Marines, saying they were too few and too far away in the open without cover attempting to support the sailors' charge. The Marine battalion's losses at Fort Fisher included 15 killed, 46 wounded in the assault, and another 3 killed and 5 wounded in the subsequent negligent explosion of the magazine after occupying the fort.<sup>55</sup>

Following a distinct pattern the failures were attributable to "lack of proper organization . . . throwing so many small squads . . . from the different vessels together in one mass, lacking proper company formations . . . unacquainted with each other . . . led to the confusion exhibited . . . not due to any want of personal valor on the part of the officers or men."<sup>56</sup> The naval brigade's poor organization, lack of specific training, and inexperienced leadership along with improper armaments at Fort Fisher encapsulate the overall causes explaining the battlefield performance ashore of the Marine Corps.

## Manning the Corps Leadership

When the war broke out, tensions were high in the Marine Corps, reflecting the U.S. military and nation as a whole. Between the first Marine officer to resign in February 1861 to the last one to do so in January 1862, a total of 20 officers of the 63 prewar officers either resigned or were dismissed and served in the Confederate States of America's military. Some as-

<sup>50</sup> Robinson, *Hurricane of Fire*, 165.

<sup>51</sup> Robinson, *Hurricane of Fire*, 166–67, 177.

<sup>52</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 11, 583–84.

<sup>53</sup> Lamb, "The Defense of Fort Fisher," 650.

<sup>54</sup> *The War of the Rebellion*, series 1, vol. 46, part 1, 400 and series 1, vol. 46, part 2, 140, 155–56.

<sup>55</sup> Robinson, *Hurricane of Fire*, 186; Selfridge, "The Navy at Fort Fisher," 660; and Sullivan, *The Final Year*, 164.

<sup>56</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 11, 447.

sert that this loss of experienced leadership resulted in the poor performance of the Corps during the war. In comparison, nearly 25 percent of the serving West Point officers resigned to serve the secessionist states in 1861, with 30 percent from the 1830–61 classes fighting for the rebel armies, while 37 percent of the 1861 class of cadets withdrew to serve the Confederacy. Few enlisted Marines defected or quit to join the secessionists. The most significant portion of the losses came from the junior officer ranks, while senior officers mostly remained loyal to the Union. By 1864, the Corps' strength was 64 officers and 3,075 enlisted; compared to the other services, it had not grown during wartime.<sup>57</sup>

Marine officers' quality was a prominent focus. Colonel Harris, Commandant of the Marine Corps in 1862, proposed future Marine officers come from appointments at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point to provide a solid education and tactical training background, but was not approved. In 1862, a bill was proposed to Congress for future appointments of Marine officers to come from the Naval Academy, but it too was denied and it would be decades before Marine officers commissioned through the academy.<sup>58</sup>

In a letter to a Navy clerk applying for a Marine officer's commission, Harris was direct to the point of politicization of commissioning: "But I would remind you, success depends entirely on the amount of political influence brought to bear." Even in 1864, when the political appointee system was less prominent than earlier in the conflict, it was still a measure of influence, as indicated in a letter from then-Commandant Colonel Zeilin to a mother: "I would advise you to obtain the aid of some political friend, it being, in fact, the only influence which can affect the object desired."<sup>59</sup> Additionally, Marine Corps officers had to be between the ages of 20 and 25 at the time of their commissioning, which arbitrarily limited many prior-service candidates. The class of

1861, entering commissioned service that fall, were of mixed experience. Of the 30 new lieutenants, 12 had some prior experience, either in the Army or as enlisted Marines, or military instruction at the Naval Academy before dropping out. There was improvement, however, with the class of 1862 having only 2 of 12 new lieutenants devoid of any military experience. Most Marine officers with prior experience were enlisted Army, a few NCOs, and the occasional rarity of an Army officer transferred to the Corps. Limited battlefield experience as a private was better than none but more would be needed for a battlefield leader; however, it provided enough discipline and routine military knowledge for leading small Marine detachments shipboard.<sup>60</sup>

In a letter offering his services as a lieutenant, Army private Edward Taylor summed up the Marine commissioning process, writing,

I asked if any effort could be made by you at home to procure for me a commission either in the Marines or in the U.S. Army. I spoke particularly of the Marines as I thought a position easier secured there than in the Infantry. . . . Naval officers, as well as Army officers, are mostly chosen from the schools at West Point and the Naval School, while the officers of Marines are more often taken from civil life. . . . A Marine is not expected to be a sailor—he is merely a soldier on shipboard. As a soldier, I have the education and drill necessary . . . but as an officer of the Marine Corps, I should do as well as the next. . . . It needs but a few or even one influential man to represent the fitness of the applicant to the Secretary and the appointment will be made.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Ralph W. Donnelly, *The Confederate States Marine Corps: The Rebel Leathernecks* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing, 1989), 170, 174; and Sullivan, *The First Year*, 44.

<sup>58</sup> Sullivan, *The Second Year*, 130, 149, 151.

<sup>59</sup> As quoted in Sullivan, *The First Year*, 158.

<sup>60</sup> Sullivan, *The First Year*, 164, 170–71; and Sullivan, *The Second Year*, 137–38, 141.

<sup>61</sup> As quoted in Sullivan, *The Second Year*, 144–45.

This highlighted that it was largely political, with the ideal not the certainty, that new lieutenants had any military education or experience. Taylor's other correspondence with his sister also hit on a reason many Army soldiers sought service in the Marines. "The number we lose in one battle would man a large navy."<sup>62</sup> Service at sea had the allure of relative safety compared to combat service ashore.

As for manning the rank-and-file, the Corps struggled overall with recruiting throughout the war. The strictness of the recruitment standards coupled with the lack of monetary incentive through bonuses undermined the Corps' ability to meet required quotas to fill ship requirements, staff Marine barracks and naval yard security detachments, provide instructors, and man permanent Marine battalions. Enlisted candidates had to pass a medical exam, be single or with a signed waiver by a spouse, and be between 21 and 35 years old. Those 18–20 could join if they had a signed waiver from a parent or guardian. Marines had to be taller than 5 foot 5 inches, though later dropped in 1862 to 5 foot 4 inches. Citizenship was required; immigrants were only accepted once they completed the naturalization process without assistance. Over time, the Corps adjusted, and in 1862 worked through immigration judges to provide naturalization free of charge to enlistees. By the last year of the war, the Corps obtained authorization to pay bonuses to recruits, thereby allowing it to monetarily compete with the bonuses available from the other Services. Aside from initial recruitment, another key aspect to maintain experience in the wartime ranks is measured by reenlistments. The Corps' record of reenlistments was poor. For example, early in the war—fever of 1861, it held only a 36-percent reenlistment rate, posing a challenge for staffing an experienced Corps.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> As quoted in Sullivan, *The Second Year*, 144–45.

<sup>63</sup> Sullivan, *The Second Year*, 131–32, 154; and Sullivan, *The Third Year*, 160. See also Sullivan, *The Second Year*, 153–56; and Sullivan, *The Third Year*, 156–76 for detailed coverage on the recruitment bonus (then called *bounties*) ordeal.

## Training

An obvious contributing factor to performance in combat is the degree of training received. Marines were ill-prepared for the complexities of land-based tactics in formation at larger echelons. However, this was not for lack of effort and certainly did not reflect the confidence and spirit of the average Marine, even if their own officers, typically those most experienced in shore combat, expressed reservations, such as prior to the Fort Sumter raid.

A Marine at Washington Barracks who participated at Bull Run wrote to his parents prior to the fight, "We will be drilled better in one Month here than the Volunteers would be in six Months."<sup>64</sup> The Navy created a provisional Marine battalion for amphibious operations in fall 1861, however, it was never used and was shortly disestablished, with the Marines returning to traditional duty. The other provisional battalion trained but was not used for the major land assault on Battery Wagner but was employed poorly on the amphibious Fort Sumter assault. This unfortunately limits solid analysis of provisional Marine battalion performance ashore in comparison to ad hoc Marine battalions, the far more common fighting Marines employed ashore. A common fear of the special amphibious battalion concept among senior Marines was its use leading to Marines being absorbed into the Army and losing their separate and naval identity, although this fear did not preclude Marines from participating regularly ashore in many small and some larger engagements, as detailed previously. New recruits recorded drills "at all hours of the day" and that they had rigorous training, although it was dominated by individual and crew drills, not collective training of larger formations. Their drills included many land-based activities, among them artillery and light infantry, as well as traditional ship battery drills.<sup>65</sup> A Marine Corps history noted, "While the Army drilled, marched, and countermarched . . . some 200 Marines were assigned to the Potomac Flotilla to scour the Maryland countryside . . . in search of Confederate

<sup>64</sup> As quoted in Sullivan, *The First Year*, 114.

<sup>65</sup> Henig, "Marines Fighting Marines"; and Sullivan, *The Second Year*, 210.

arms.<sup>66</sup> These sorts of activities, however, did not prepare them for large maneuvers ashore, although it did provide experiences and contributions to the war effort even if at the expense of more time training for larger land engagements.

Major Reynolds trained and drilled a select Marine detachment, creating a specifically organized amphibious battalion to serve with Admiral Samuel Dupont's flotilla. Unfortunately, this special drilled amphibious force was never used for anything more than garrison duty of abandoned coastal forts, such as St. Augustine, Florida. On 25 March, Dupont released Reynolds and his amphibious battalion back to normal Marine duty across the fleet.<sup>67</sup> Much as a pattern can be seen in attribution to poor organization, training, leadership, and proper equipping, so it was in repeated experiments in forming organized amphibious battalion-size elements organized, trained, and designed for land operations never used and disbanded for the needs of the fleet.

Zeilin, one of the most experienced Marine officers in combat ashore, formed one of the provisional, semipermanently organized battalions at Marine Barracks Brooklyn comprising 12 officers, 13 sergeants, 12 corporals, 6 musicians, and 233 privates from across the various Marine barracks, stations, and naval ships. It departed New York on 13 July 1864. This composite Marine battalion drilled on Morris Island, South Carolina, for an assault on Battery Wagner but was never employed against those enemy fortifications.<sup>68</sup> Zeilin requested relief from the command in a message to Rear Admiral John Dahlgren, asserting the Marines assembled were unable to accomplish the task of storming the enemy fortifications and noting, "The Marine Corps is accustomed to act in small detachments on board of ship and ashore, and opportunities rarely offer to have more than one company together." Certainly reflecting on his own experiences in previous land combat, notably at Bull Run, he continued, "It is absolutely necessary that they should have time to become organized and drilled as a battalion and to

know their officers and their duties on a larger scale." He pointed out,

Many of these men are raw recruits . . . every garrison, receiving (ship), and even seagoing ships at the North, has been stripped to get these few together; and until they are exercised for some time under their present officers . . . it would be very dangerous to attempt any hazardous operations requiring coolness and promptness . . . and no duty which they could be called upon to perform requires such perfect discipline and drill as landing under fire. As few of these have ever seen an enemy . . . they would doubtless fall into great confusion despite the best efforts of their officers.<sup>69</sup>

He elaborated on the difficulty of drilling in the heat on a narrow beach during the day and of darkness at night precluding training for company and larger formations.<sup>70</sup>

While it is true that nearly 78 percent of the Marines available to Zeilin for the Charleston operations had previous service, service does not equate to combat experience, especially the sort needed. While this may have been true of the enlisted, 10 of the 14 Marine officers had direct combat experience either in the Mexican-American War, earlier in the Civil War, or both, such as Zeilin. Dahlgren, his faith in the Marine battalion shaken, wrote in his diary, "The Commander of Marines reports against risking his men in attacking works. Two of his officers had done the same in conversation. I said it must come from the Senior in writing. Rather hurtful. What are Marines for?"<sup>71</sup> Dahlgren removed the Marines from any plans to storm Wagner and used them for security and guard duties. The following attempted assault on Fort Sumter painfully vindicated these concerns. The Marine battalion assembled on Morris Island had been the

<sup>66</sup> Nalty, *United States Marines at Harpers Ferry*, 10.

<sup>67</sup> Nalty, *United States Marines at Harpers Ferry*, 11, 14.

<sup>68</sup> Sullivan, *The Third Year*, 46, 53–54.

<sup>69</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 14, 439.

<sup>70</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 14, 439.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Sullivan, *The Third Year*, 57.

largest gathering of Marines in one formation since the Mexican-American War.<sup>72</sup>

Oddly, a consistent desire for Navy squadrons along the coast was to possess a Marine battalion-size formation, but they rarely maintained these provisional, semipermanent battalions with any continuity, supported them adequately, or employed them correctly, if at all. In a hybrid manner, Captain Edward Reynolds managed a composite Marine battalion in the aftermath of the Fort Sumter debacle with the Marines remaining in the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron under Admiral Dahlgren. It was neither a semipermanent provisional battalion detached from ship duty organized for duty ashore nor was it a temporary, ad hoc immediate operation formation. Reynolds continually worked to acclimate this Marine battalion in Port Royal, South Carolina, gathering the Marines together to conduct drills twice a day. The reputation of this composite Marine battalion grew.<sup>73</sup>

Dahlgren's composite fleet brigade of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron drilled for a day and a half before embarking on the Honey Hill expedition, one of the most successful (relatively) Marine forays into land combat during the war. It comprised two battalions of sailors and one of Marines, led by the only Marine officer of the fleet, a Second Lieutenant George G. Stoddard with less than two years in the Corps. The other officer vacancies in the Marine battalion were filled by naval ensigns designated acting Marine officers and Marine NCOs filling the company leadership.<sup>74</sup> Dahlgren commented after observing their training, "The officers are clever and the men zealous . . . it is very difficult to get the officers into the idea of light drill and open order. They will mass the men."<sup>75</sup> Stoddard wrote, "Although sergeants make good acting officers, still, in action, they do not feel the responsibility; neither do they have that moral effect on the men that a commissioned officer does. . . . Please allow me to call your attention to the fact that

with 200 Marines in this squadron there is but one officer."<sup>76</sup>

As the war progressed, this exemplified how—even without an organized, cohesive doctrine—differently minded officers grasped the importance and opportunity of preparation for large-scale land operations and struggled to prepare ad hoc Marine battalions for success in them. Without this, Marine battalions courted disaster on land, as shown by the naval brigade at Fort Fisher, having never drilled together prior to the assault.<sup>77</sup>

## Conclusion

By the end of the war, the Corps included 3,900 Marines, equating to roughly 7 percent of the Navy, which was actually a drop from the prewar numbers of 20 percent, since the U.S. Navy grew during the war while the Corps remained virtually stagnant in size. Marine Corps losses in the war on ship and land totaled 102 killed in action, 233 accidental or disease, 175 wounded, and 266 captured, paling in comparison to the casualties of the Army. Notably, 16 of 24 of the initial postwar brevets (rewards for wartime service for officers) awarded were conveyed on Marines for land-based operations.<sup>78</sup>

Based on these examinations, it becomes clear that the Marines performed poorly when led by naval officers and in an independent manner as compared to a combined Army-Navy force. When Marine battalions were integrated into Army lines of battle, their performance equaled that of the U.S. infantry, with the exception of First Bull Run, which was a poor performance by all, with even the Army infantry and leadership as inept and inexperienced as the Marines. At the second Fort Fisher assault, the Marines—once employed with the Army—also positively contributed to the victory. Indisputably, with each circumstance, individual Marines and their officers displayed courage, bravery, and dedication, fighting vigorously

<sup>72</sup> Sullivan, *The Third Year*, 56.

<sup>73</sup> Sullivan, *The Third Year*, 221.

<sup>74</sup> Sullivan, *The Final Year*, 74, 76, 78–79.

<sup>75</sup> As quoted in Sullivan, *The Final Year*, 78.

<sup>76</sup> ORN, series 1, vol. 16, 102.

<sup>77</sup> Selfridge, "The Navy at Fort Fisher," 659.

<sup>78</sup> Donnelly, *The Confederate States Marine Corps*, 4–5; and Sullivan, *The Final Year*, 238, 249–50.

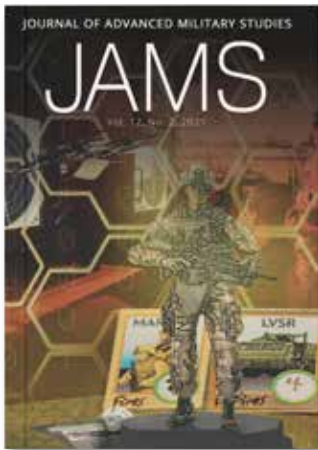
and noteworthily regardless of ad hoc organization, ineffective training, poor leadership, or planning.

Awareness of Navy priorities allows better alignment of Service priorities and understanding of limitations on force adaptation and importance of manpower management. This explains how the traditional manning of the fleet impacted the secondary priority of Marine battalions for operations ashore, forcing ad hoc organizations. A backward approach

to talent management and the accessions process hindered innovation and adaptation, as seen in the struggles with Marine officer quality. Shipboard security and punitive small raids as priority employment directly influenced training focus on individual and crew drills to the neglect of complicated, collective training with telling effects on Marine performance in large-scale combat ashore.

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# A Calamity of Errors

## THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE 5TH REGIMENT AT BLANC MONT RIDGE ON 4 OCTOBER 1918

by James P. Gregory Jr.

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**Abstract:** The Battle of Blanc Mont on 4 October 1918 had the worst single day's casualties for the Marine Corps in World War I with the 5th Regiment suffering 1,097 casualties. However, the details of the attacks by the 5th Regiment are very commonly left out or glossed over in official accounts, memoirs, and discussions after the war. Why is this important and why is an analysis of the actions on this horrific day absent from so many primary sources? The answer is multifaceted: command's failure to properly coordinate the attack, senior leaders lacking awareness due to posts of command initially remote from the front lines, overzealous Marines, a chaotic retreat, and a lack of acknowledgment of 4 October after the war. The untold story of 4 October, the good and the bad, deserves to be recognized in order to remember those Marines who gave their lives that day and to acknowledge the lessons from the failures, blunders, and defeat, as they are also a part of the larger history of actions of the Marine Corps in World War I.

**Keywords:** Battle of Blanc Mont, Blanc Mont, Meuse-Argonne, Marine Corps, 2d Division, the Box, 5th Regiment

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Historian Allan R. Millett noted that 4 October 1918, during the Battle of Blanc Mont, saw “the worst single day’s casualties for the Marines” in World War I.<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Peter F. Owen and Lieutenant Colonel John Swift confirmed this in *A Hideous Price: The 4th Brigade at Blanc Mont, 2–10 October 1918*, stating that the 5th Regiment suffered

1,097 casualties on 4 October.<sup>2</sup> Neither the terrific fighting of Belleau Wood nor the slaughter in the beet fields at Soissons created such a high casualty count in a single day. However, the details of the attacks on 4 October by the 4th Brigade and its two infantry regiments, the 5th and 6th Regiments, are very commonly left out or glossed over in official accounts, memoirs, and discussions after the war. Not until recent decades, approaching the World War I centennial, have the events of that day garnered a more detailed discussion in Marine Corps histories. Why is an analysis of this horrific day absent from so many primary sources? The answer lies with the failure of command to properly coordinate and understand the attack,

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<sup>1</sup> Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 314.

<sup>2</sup> LtCol Peter F. Owen, USMC (Ret), and LtCol John Swift, USMC (Ret), *A Hideous Price: The 4th Brigade at Blanc Mont, 2–10 October 1918* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2019), 54. See this work for a better understanding of the larger context of 4 October and the Battle of Blanc Mont.



overzealous Marines, a chaotic retreat, and a lack of acknowledgment of 4 October shortly after the war.

These blunders bled the American Expeditionary Forces' (AEF) 2d Infantry Division and its Marine brigade. Yet, officials have ignored the calamity of errors that befell the 4th Brigade. The Marine Corps will be perceived by those who study the details of the October 1918 battle as not acknowledging their tactical failures. The battle for Belleau Wood in June 1918 is the touchstone World War I historical focus. Marines learn of that battle from the beginnings of their commitment to the Corps, however, there is much to be learned from other major battles of the Great War, including the missteps and failures of leadership at Blanc Mont. Even the terminology used in discussing the events of 4 October show a reluctance to admit that some Marines did chaotically run toward the rear to escape what was perceived to be certain death as their command structure fell apart. It was a short moment, but oral histories and a command investigation serve to document the retreat, as detailed later. Those writers who have chronicled the events of 4 October for the Marine Corps have shied from terms like *panic* and *retreat*, characterizing the action as a "withdrawal" and describing Marines as "falling back."<sup>3</sup> However, participant accounts demonstrate that some Marines did panic and retreat, leading to widespread chaos.

The rigorous study of history demands we investigate failures as well as herald victories. Otherwise, credibility suffers as myth overcomes reality and leads to a stronger sense of infallibility. Admitting failures of the past—embracing them—reveals the true valor and sacrifice of the Marines and the lessons bought for a terrible price.

The Battle of Blanc Mont took place in the Champagne region of France. The chalky soil of the region made fortification easy for the Germans, who successfully turned the unimposing ridges into fortified defensive positions with extended fields of fire.

Intricate trench networks spread across the region. The 2d Division, with its 3d Infantry Brigade and 4th Brigade, faced a series of German rear guard positions that had been improved in the preceding year. The division's zone of attack focused on three ridges, with the middle ridge, Blanc Mont Ridge, being the key to the German positions.<sup>4</sup>

The Germans had constructed redoubts and laid razor wire to channel attacking forces into designated kill zones. Nature also provided protection and assistance to the German forces. Overgrown farmlands afforded wide-open fields of fire. Newly sprouted scrub pine grew in forested pockets on Blanc Mont Ridge and other knolls around it, obscuring the ridge and its reverse slope. The Sommepey-Saint-Étienne road also aided the Germans by dividing the 2d Division's zone, making it an obvious avenue of approach for the attacking force. Thus, Blanc Mont Ridge seemed almost impregnable by the time 2d Division arrived.<sup>5</sup>

The German *XII Corps* defended Blanc Mont Ridge under the command of General of Cavalry Krug von Nidda. He realized that his numbers would be insufficient to hold the line. Therefore, his objective was not to repel an attack but to inflict as many casualties as possible while performing a fighting withdrawal. Even if the 2d Division captured the ridge after taking heavy casualties, it would still be a tactical victory for the Germans.<sup>6</sup>

Before the arrival of the 2d Division, the French 4th Army had taken the German first line of defense. This left the second main line of resistance just north of Sommepey, the third main line of resistance along Blanc Mont Ridge, and the fourth main line of resistance in the vicinity of Saint-Étienne.<sup>7</sup> Each line consisted of several trench lines, underground bunkers, and hardened strongpoints. The German defensive plan relied on forward outpost zones with light defenses of machine guns and forward observers concentrating fire on the attackers from fortified bunkers. These zones allowed the majority of the German infantry to

<sup>3</sup> For instance, Owen and Swift, *A Hideous Price*, 35, describes the action as "the units fell back." However, in Peter F. Owen, *To the Limit of Endurance: A Battalion of Marines in the Great War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 174, he describes it as "the 5th Marines retreated in disorder." The Marine Corps' official publication by Owen and Swift does not use the word *retreat*.

<sup>4</sup> Owen and Swift, *A Hideous Price*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Owen and Swift, *A Hideous Price*, 8–9.

<sup>6</sup> Owen and Swift, *A Hideous Price*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Owen and Swift, *A Hideous Price*, 10–11.

avoid early combat. This meant that by the time the Americans would reach the main line of resistance, weakened by casualties and slowed by obstacles, the German infantry could successfully counterattack.<sup>8</sup>

This is the situation the 2d Division found itself up against on 1 October 1918. That night, the 2d Division's 3d and 4th Brigades relieved the French 61st Division near Sommepey. The division was ordered to attack on 2 October, but Major General John A. Lejeune, Marine commanding general of the division, did not believe that there was enough time to organize a proper reconnaissance to successfully engage the enemy nor could the 2d Field Artillery Brigade have time to occupy its firing positions before the attack. The French agreed to postpone the attack until 3 October. The Allied plan revolved on an idea of simultaneous attacks by all three divisions: the French 21st Infantry Division on the left, American 2d Division in the middle, and the French 170th Division on the right. This large push would "limit the German defenders' ability to maneuver within their elastic defensive positions and prevent them from concentrating fires and counterattacks against a single attacking division."<sup>9</sup>

The attack on 3 October was somewhat successful for the 2d Division. The 4th Brigade's 6th Regiment had taken part of Blanc Mont Ridge, but many fortified positions along the summit remained. Deep bunkers and a network of communication trenches were anticipated to take several more days to capture. The 6th Regiment had "destroyed at least two battalions of infantry, captured hundreds of prisoners, and seized the Blanc Mont-Medeah Farm road" but despite these victories, the Marines were still victims of direct fire from German artillery as they continued to hold the ridge.<sup>10</sup> The 5th Regiment had cleaned out a section of the trench network called the Essen Hook that morning and captured more than 100 prisoners. Unfortunately, this key fortified position was turned over to the French forces, who lost portions of it that afternoon.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Owen and Swift, *A Hideous Price*, 10–11.

<sup>9</sup> Owen and Swift, *A Hideous Price*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Owen and Swift, *A Hideous Price*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> Owen and Swift, *A Hideous Price*, 16–26.

## The Attack

On the morning of 4 October 1918, the 3d and 4th Brigades prepared to attack the German positions. An agreement among the battalion commanders, delivered by runner, inexplicably designated 0600 as the time of attack on 4 October.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, 5th Regiment began its push forward and was immediately subjected to the heavy German defenses. However, this was not according to the plan of 4th Brigade and divisional headquarters. The official plan of the day, spelled out in 4th Brigade *Field Order No. 19*, issued at 0200 on 4 October, were

Our Army Corps is to continue the advance on 4 October. The 170th Division French is to take position in the left rear of the 2nd Division and follow its advance. The 3rd Brigade advances on the right of the 4th Brigade. The 22nd Division French attacks on the left of the 2nd Division.<sup>13</sup>

The field order states that "the hour of advance will be announced later." The 2d Field Artillery Brigade was designated to support the attack; no tanks would be provided, and aerial support would be ordered by the 2d Division.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, at 0600, the 5th Regiment began its advance.

The 5th Regiment launched its attack north, under German artillery barrage, moving through the 6th Regiment atop Blanc Mont Ridge. Using the Sommepey-Saint-Étienne road as a guide, the 5th Regiment attacked with the 3d Battalion in the lead, the 2d Battalion in support, and the 1st Battalion in reserve. To the east of the 5th Regiment, the 3d Brigade, with

<sup>12</sup> Account of former Capt Thomas Quigley, commanding officer, 45th Company, wounded on 4 October, 27 May 1926, provided to the author from the personal collection of Peter F. Owen, originally found in Record Group (RG) 117, Records of the American Battle Monuments Commission, Correspondence with Officers of the American Expeditionary Forces, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); and Summary of Operations, 30 January 1926, provided to the author from the personal collection of Peter F. Owen, originally found in RG 117, NARA.

<sup>13</sup> *Brigade Field Order No. 19*, 0200, 4 October 1918, in *Records of the Second Division (Regular)*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Army War College, 1927), comp. by Capt Cyllburn O. Mattfeldt.

<sup>14</sup> *Brigade Field Order No. 19*, 0200, 4 October 1918.



Courtesy of Bruce Malone

2d Division, American Expeditionary Forces, “boulder marker” in the area of the former German position known as the Ludwigs Rücken.

its 9th and 23d Infantry Regiments, spent the morning of 4 October defending the advanced position it had captured the previous day. The 23d Regiment would only pass through the 9th Regiment later in the day.<sup>15</sup> The 5th Regiment and 23d Regiment would both be entering an area between the reverse slope of Blanc Mont Ridge, Ludwigs Rücken, and Blodnitz Hill.<sup>16</sup>

The commencement of the 5th Regiment’s attack caused a mass of confusion within the 4th Brigade and 2d Division headquarters, too far in the rear to understand how the attack progressed. Command attempted to grasp the situation and coordinate the advance.

However, their attempts to coordinate added to the overall confusion of the battle as orders began to conflict.

*Division Field Order No. 37* from Major General Lejeune directed that “the advance will be made by the division at an hour to be communicated later, and will be pushed forward without regard to the progress of the divisions on the right and left.” The 15th U.S. Field Artillery Regiment was selected to provide rolling and standing barrages for the attack and the 252d Aero Squadron, Air Service, AEF, would assist the division.<sup>17</sup> In direct contrast to this, at 1055 on 4

<sup>15</sup> Owen and Swift, *A Hideous Price*, 39.

<sup>16</sup> This area colloquially became known as “the Box” and is described by Pvt Elton E. Mackin, a battalion runner in 67th Company (D), 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, in his semifictional memoir *Suddenly We Didn’t Want to Die: Memoirs of a World War I Marine* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> *Field Order No. 37*, Divisional Field Orders, 0600, 4 October 1918, in *Records of the Second Division (Regular)*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Army War College, 1927), comp. by Capt Cylburn O. Mattfeldt. The author believes the air squadron is a typo in the original records as the 252d did not make it overseas; instead, it should read 258th Aero Squadron, attached to the 2d Division.

October, a memorandum was sent to Army brigadier general Hanson E. Ely, commanding general, 3d Brigade, by Army colonel James C. Rhea, chief of staff, 2d Division, which stated that

The Division will move forward today at H hour, according to the order sent you last night. H Hour has not been decided at this moment because we are waiting for the attack of the divisions on our right and left which started at 9:50 A.M. to develop. We do not want to get any further out in advance of those divisions.<sup>18</sup>

According to 4th Brigade and 2d Division headquarters, the 5th Regiment's attack should not have started until the afternoon. Additionally, headquarters did not know the position of the Marines on the front line. This culminated in a ridiculous and dangerous spectacle witnessed by the 67th Company, 5th Regiment, during the push forward. The company had moved more than a kilometer from its jump-off point. While halted just north of the junction of a dirt road and the Sommepey-Saint-Étienne road, the Marines witnessed a

spectacular dash into the enemy lines by a staff car. Through mis-information the occupant of this staff car must have been under the impression that our front line was several miles ahead of its actual location. The car approached from the rear at a terrific speed and passing us proceeded down the road into the enemy territory. The car was greeted with a burst of machine gun fire and several riflemen opened up on it. The driver stopped his car, turned it, and again passed us at top speed. The driver and the occupant were unhurt by the fire, but they

no doubt had been treated to the thrill of their lives.<sup>19</sup>

No doubt an attempt to figure out exactly what was happening at the front, the staff car made it back to the American lines for a report and possibly a change of clothes.

For the attacking Americans, the confusion at headquarters also meant that they advanced with no artillery support. The 15th Field Artillery Regiment should have provided a rolling barrage that would suppress the German defenders by blasting everything immediately in front of the infantry as they moved forward. Unfortunately, the artillery did not receive any order about the 0600 attack. Instead, the entire 5th Regiment walked straight into a German artillery barrage and a well-prepared defensive line. Marine Corps Reserve second lieutenant Sydney Thayer Jr., the platoon commander of 43d Company (F), 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, recalled in a letter to the American Battlefield Monuments Commission (ABMC) dated 1 May 1926,

Late in the afternoon of October 4th, Lt. [Edward] Klein of the 12th or 15th U.S. Field Artillery Regiment, who was serving in the capacity of liaison officer, visited me, and when we got oriented he told me that as far as he knew, the supporting artillery had absolutely no knowledge that an attack was to be made that day, and until then he had absolutely no idea where we were. This, of course, would not make good reading from a staff point of view, but inasmuch as it is the truth, I thought I would let you have it for what it is worth.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Memorandum, Divisional Field Orders, 1055, 4 October 1918, in *Records of the Second Division (Regular)*, vol. 1.

<sup>19</sup> "The 67th Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, in the Champagne," provided to author from the personal collection of Peter F. Owen, originally found in RG 117, NARA.

<sup>20</sup> Account of Sydney Thayer, 1 May 1926, provided to author from the personal collection of Peter F. Owen, originally found in RG 117, NARA.



Courtesy of Steven C. Girard

Capt Henry L. Larsen, commanding officer, 3d Battalion, 5th Regiment.

Furthermore, while the 252d Aero Squadron was designated to receive a copy of *Division Field Order No. 37*, there is no evidence the squadron was assigned any duties prior to the still-undesignated H-hour.<sup>21</sup> This left the air completely in the possession of the German airplanes that constantly attacked the Marines and soldiers as they advanced forward.

In addition to the lack of divisional awareness, the French did not operate according to the American plan of action. Instead of pushing northward to connect to the 6th Regiment, the French 22d Division

drifted northwesterly, leaving a gap.<sup>22</sup> This caused the 6th Regiment to place more support on its left flank, leaving the liaison with the 5th Regiment on its right open. The French 170th Division also failed to push forward enough to liaison with the 3d Brigade, leaving its right flank exposed. This proved to be costly, as it left both flanks of the 2d Division open, allowing the German defenders to attack on both sides of the Americans.<sup>23</sup> The mass confusion of those in command would quickly prove deadly to troops of the 3d and 4th Brigades.

The 3d Battalion, 5th Regiment, under the command of Captain Henry L. Larsen, led with the 47th Company and 16th Company abreast and with the 45th Company and 20th Company in support. As the companies deployed into their attack formation and moved toward the Ludwigs Rücken, German artillery and heavy German machine-gun fire from the front, left, and left rear inflicted heavy casualties.<sup>24</sup> A personal account made to the ABMC years after the war by a Marine veteran of the 67th Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, stated,

The enemy held the west end of the ridge to the north, the road at the west end of the valley . . . and he had machine guns in the woods to the south-west. Into the open end of this horseshoe of fire the battalion advanced. . . . As the line advanced the intensity of the fire increased . . . the air was so filled with flying lead that the noise resembled the tune of a swarm of angry bees.<sup>25</sup>

Despite heavy losses, the Marines pushed hard against the German forces, who appeared to be retreating. The

<sup>22</sup> Owen and Swift, *A Hideous Price*, 33.

<sup>23</sup> Telephone message from Col Hugh B. Myers to G-3, 21st French Division, Field Messages HQ 2d Division, AEF, 1500, 4 October 1918, in *Records of the Second Division (Regular)*, vol. 5 (Washington, DC: U.S. Army War College, 1927), comp. by Capt Cylburn O. Mattfeldt.

<sup>24</sup> Account of former Capt Augustus B. Hale, commanding officer, 77th Company (C), 6th Machine Gun Battalion, 12 April 1930, from the personal collection of Peter F. Owen, in RG 117, NARA.

<sup>25</sup> "The 67th Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, in the Champagne."

<sup>21</sup> Author believes 252d Aero Squadron is a typo in the original records that should read 258th Aero Squadron. See footnote 17.

Marines chased them down. Private Elton Mackin, 67th Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, recalled that

Men seldom run headlong during an attack. . . . Sometimes the excitement, the lust for action, gets the better of judgment and you travel too fast, overrunning objectives. This is especially true if human game breaks into view to lure you on when almost all your officers are down. . . . The fury of their rush, coupled with the sight of running quarry, led them on. The way led down a gentle open slope; the hunting was good. So they followed after. . . . Scarcely pausing, they shot the gunners down amidst their pieces and chased the survivors into the cover of the patch of wood beyond. They were in their element—the Yankee style of fighting amid the trees. . . . The line broke into scattered groups, all pressing forward. . . . While the fever of the attack lasted, discipline was forgotten in the urge to hunt and kill. . . . The wily German had drawn his troops away to either side as the hunters ran down their quarry and now Heinie had the remnant of a marine battalion bottled in a long, narrow belt of woods, with the slope and stubbled field behind them. It was a place for men to die; a spearhead of out-flung battle line thrust deeply into the German front, exposed to fire from three sides, its line of communication cut off by enfilading Maxims firing from the flanks.<sup>26</sup>

The overzealous Marines, hot on the tails of the German forces, had pushed into the German front, creating a pocket surrounded on three sides. They had run into a deathtrap. Almost as soon as the 5th Regiment

emerged from cover over the slope from Blanc Mont and into a draw before the base of Ludwigs Rücken, the German defenders opened fire. The Marines encountered strong machine-gun fire coming from the northwestern side of Blanc Mont Ridge, as well as from their front and on each flank. Private Harvey Hurst, 43d Company, 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, wounded at Blanc Mont, explained the predicament:

At Blanc Mont Ridge either because the Marines went so fast, or because of misunderstanding, the French on their left and the army on the right failed to come up to their support. The French had ordered them to take a certain objective. They took it and were left in a little pocket.<sup>27</sup>

Captain Augustus B. Hale, commanding officer of the 77th Machine Gun Company, 6th Machine Gun Battalion, attached to the 3d Battalion, 5th Regiment, later reported to the ABMC:

As the 47th Co. and 45th Co. (who were the leading units) advanced down the hill toward St. Etienne, the enemy could be seen in small groups coming from the trenches in front of St. Etienne and making for the bottom of the hill to our left as if they intended an attack on our left rear. At this time, we were suddenly subjected to heavy machine gun, trench mortar, one pounder and some artillery fire.<sup>28</sup>

The Marines' overzealous push forward left their flanks exposed. In one case, they had not properly cleared the woods from which they emerged. According to a letter sent to the ABMC by Major Littleton W. T. Waller Jr., commanding officer of the 6th Machine Gun Battalion, "the infantry and machine guns

<sup>27</sup> "Harvey Hurst, 43d Co., 5th Regiment, USMC," *Iron County Register* (Ironton, MO), 6 March 1919.

<sup>28</sup> Account of former Capt Augustus B. Hale, 12 April 1930, provided to author from the personal collection of Peter F. Owen, originally found in RG 117, NARA.

<sup>26</sup> Mackin, *Suddenly We Didn't Want to Die*, 187–88.

were suddenly subjected to heavy machine gun fire from the front and flanks, apparently the woods had not been cleared out during the advance.”<sup>29</sup> The Marine casualties quickly rose as the wounded poured into the medical dressing station “not now and then, but in a steady stream.”<sup>30</sup>

The heavy losses forced Major Larsen, commanding officer of the 3d Battalion, 5th Regiment, to send a field message at 1300 requesting assistance in their desperate attempt to hold the position. “Cannot hold front line longer; that is, my position. . . . Have evacuated 3 company commanders and many officers—having hard time to hold men together. Am sending this request to 1st and 2nd Battalions to come up and help hold. . . . Situation is critical.”<sup>31</sup> As the 3d Battalion attempted to survive the inundating fire and several counterattacks, the 2d Battalion, commanded by Major Robert E. Messersmith, worked to move up in support.

The Marines of 2d Battalion found themselves in an equally dire predicament as they moved up to the 3d Battalion. As stated earlier, the failure of headquarters to provide air support allowed the Germans to control the skies. German aviators flew low, using their machine guns to good effect against the Marines. They also dropped numerous hand bombs on the attacking force. This constant harassment forced the 23d Machine Gun Company, attached to the 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, to keep busy engaging the planes instead of the attackers that surrounded them.<sup>32</sup> As Captain DeWitt Peck, commanding officer of the 55th Company, 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, later stated of their terrifying position, “The 43rd Co. was receiving

fire from five directions . . . the North, East, West, and South, and an airplane shooting down from above.”<sup>33</sup>

The 2d Battalion’s attempt to support the 3d Battalion failed, as it too fell prey to the horrific fire. Artillery, machine guns, and planes cut down the Marines as they scattered into isolated groups and began to dig in. From the German perspective, Lieutenant Colonel Ernst Otto wrote of 4 October 1918:

The separate and isolated groups coming in carelessly at first, were at once subjected to a withering concentrated fire of light and heavy machine guns. Everywhere good results were observed. Gaping holes were torn in the lines of riflemen, entire columns being mowed down. Much to our advantage were the light yellow-brown uniforms of the Americans, altogether impractical for this terrain. They were visible at great distances and offered excellent targets. . . . One could plainly observe that the unrest in his rank grew every minute. Lone individuals and frequently entire detachments, ran aimlessly about. . . . Already, a few began to escape up the hill; finally the hostile detachments, in wild flight, hastened up the slope. . . . Even during their flight, they were sharply pursued by our machine-gun fire.<sup>34</sup>

A carrier pigeon message from the German *200th Division*, who were engaging the 23d Infantry, also recorded the plight of the Marines: “Enemy advanced far in sector of right neighbor division. . . . Enemy in sector

<sup>29</sup> Account of Maj Littleton W. T. Waller Jr., included with the account and records of Ziba Drollinger, 23 February 1928, provided to author from the personal collection of Peter F. Owen, originally found in RG 117, NARA.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Derby, *“Wade In, Sanitary!”: The Story of a Division Surgeon in France* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1919), 146.

<sup>31</sup> Field Message from Larsen, 1300, 4 October 1918, in *Records of the Second Division (Regular)*, vol. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Account of former Capt John P. McCann, 28 April 1926, provided to author from the personal collection of Peter F. Owen, originally found in RG 117, NARA.

<sup>33</sup> Account of Capt DeWitt Peck, 29 April 1926, provided to author from the personal collection of Peter F. Owen, originally found in RG 117, NARA.

<sup>34</sup> LtCol Ernst Otto, *The Battle at Blanc Mont (October 2 to October 10, 1918)*, trans. by Martin Lichtenburg (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1930), 79.

of right neighbor regt forced to retreat by our flanking MG fire.”<sup>35</sup>

Confirming this story, Private John E. Ausland, 55th Company, 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, recounted their attempt to reach the 3d Battalion.

We couldn't see through these trees to the right or left, except for the men nearest you, but we could see ahead. And apparently the enemy ahead could see us. . . . All Hell broke loose. “Dig in,” shouted Captain Peck. As we dug, the shells from the German artillery on the ridge ahead rained on us. The machine guns on our left, possibly three hundred yards away, opened up shooting through the evergreens by calculation. . . . Lieutenant [Joseph E.] Maher was killed and Captain Peck was hit in the neck. . . . Seeing we faced annihilation Captain Peck shouted, “Fall Back.” “By whose orders?” the men shouted back. “By order of Captain Peck,” was the reply. And so the retirement began. As men saw a chance to make it they left. . . . But I have to give it to Captain Peck. He was wounded and was going to get out of here anyway and could have left us to our fate, or let some other officer give the orders to fall back. He had everything to lose, personally, and nothing to gain but he gave the order anyway, and the Marine Corps doesn't look lightly on falling back, no matter why.<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately, this order to fall back led to the only known retreat by the Marine Corps in World War I.

<sup>35</sup> Extract from Carrier Pigeon Message of 200th Division, #21, “War Diary of the 51st Reserve Division from September 29 to October 5, 1918,” 1530, 4 October 1918, in *Translations of War Diaries of German Units Opposed to the Second Division (Regular), 1918*, vol. 8 (Washington, DC: U.S. Army War College, 1927), trans. by Gustav J. Braun and Trevor W. Swett.

<sup>36</sup> John E. Ausland, “The Last Kilometer: Goodbye World,” as cited in Owen and Swift, *A Hideous Price*, 35.



Courtesy of Steven C. Girard  
Capt DeWitt Peck, commanding officer, 55th Company, 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment.

Seeing the advance of the 2d Battalion, Major Larsen ordered the survivors of the 3d Battalion to fall back to better positions behind the 2d Battalion.<sup>37</sup> However, as they began to fall back, the 2d Battalion did not hold its position. Instead, members of the 2d Battalion also began to chaotically retreat “as men saw a chance to make it.”<sup>38</sup> This collapse of both battalions led to a disorganized retreat of the Marines. Fortunately, at this critical moment the 1st Battalion arrived in support. Major George W. Hamilton, commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, witnessed Major Messersmith, Captain Peck, Captain David T. Jackson (commanding officer of the 18th Company), and sev-

<sup>37</sup> Field Message from Adjutant 4th Brigade, headquarters, 1440, 4 October 1918, in *Records of the Second Division (Regular)*, vol. 4 (Washington, DC: U.S. Army War College, 1927).

<sup>38</sup> Ausland, “The Last Kilometer: Goodbye World,” 35.



eral lieutenants at the forefront of this retreat. Major Messersmith explained “that he had lost all his officers” and Captain Jackson appeared hopeless. Major Hamilton and Captain James A. Nelms, commanding officer of the 8th Company (Regimental Machine Gun Company), 5th Regiment, endeavored to turn the men back but were “forced to draw their pistols” to stop the retreat. Hamilton and Nelms stopped the rout and organized the remaining men of the 3d and 2d Battalions with the 1st Battalion ordering them to dig in along the edges of the woods.<sup>39</sup>

With the consolidation of the 5th Regiment’s battalions, the 1st Battalion now absorbed the enemy’s fire, suffering as the 2d and 3d Battalions had all morning. Private Ausland recalled, “We now had no line. Just groups of men in the patches of woods, and no real connection between the groups.”<sup>40</sup> Throughout the afternoon, isolated squads of Marines attempted to reconnect with their regiment’s defensive positions. Private Hurst recalled that “all night, they were exposed to a raking machine gun fire from each of these two flanks. Seeing their plight, the Germans broke through on their rear; and thus through one whole night that outfit was ‘stormed at by shot and shell’ on all four sides. It was worse than Belleau Wood while it lasted.”<sup>41</sup> Even though the 5th Regiment had been rendered combat ineffective, the Marines continued to fight until finally being relieved on 9 October.<sup>42</sup>

## An Investigation

After the battle for Blanc Mont Ridge ended for the 2d Division on 10 October and command of the field was transferred to the 36th Division, AEF, the full impact of the 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment’s chaotic retreat became clear. On 13 October, Major Messersmith was told by letter from Colonel Logan F. Feland, commanding officer of 5th Regiment, that Major

Hamilton had reported the retreat on 4 October, including Messersmith’s failure of command. Feland’s letter directed Messersmith to “submit to me any statement you may desire to make in regard to that part of the report referring to yourself.” Major Hamilton’s 4 October report became the initial complaint against Messersmith.<sup>43</sup> On 15 October, Colonel Feland ordered Lieutenant Colonel Julius S. Turrill, his regimental executive officer, to “conduct an investigation in order to determine and report upon the facts which may be established in regard to the conduct of Major Robert E. Messersmith, U.S. Marine Corps, during the action in which the regiment was engaged on October 4, 1918.”<sup>44</sup>

In his 16 October written comments on the report, Major Messersmith seemed to place blame on Captain David Jackson, stating,

Shortly after establishing my P.C. [post of command], I noticed Captain David T. Jackson in opening at top. Captain Jackson to best of my knowledge remained at top of this P.C. from this time until evening of October 6th, 1918 when we were relieved. . . . Inasmuch as “E” Company, the command of Captain Jackson was some distance removed from my P.C., it was not the proper place for him to occupy. . . . By his being away from his company the entire responsibility of the Company rested on 1st Lieutenant [John R.] Foster who ably carried out all duties.<sup>45</sup>

Messersmith completely ignored the retreat on 4 October by starting his report after the 1st Battalion had consolidated the battalions of the regiment.

Despite the allegations of leadership misconduct, other Marines, such as Captain James McBrayer Sellers, commanding officer of the 78th Company,

<sup>39</sup> Robert E. Messersmith biographical file, “Report of Major George W. Hamilton, 4 October 1918,” Historical Resources Branch, Marine Corps History Division (MCHD), Quantico, VA.

<sup>40</sup> Ausland, “The Last Kilometer: Goodbye World,” 37.

<sup>41</sup> “Harvey Hurst, 43d Co., 5th Regiment, USMC.”

<sup>42</sup> BGen Edwin Howard Simmons and Col Joseph H. Alexander, *Through the Wheat: The U.S. Marines in World War I* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 211.

<sup>43</sup> Robert E. Messersmith biographical file, Logan Feland to Robert Messersmith, 11 October 1918, MCHD.

<sup>44</sup> Robert E. Messersmith biographical file, Logan Feland to LtCol J. S. Turrill, 15 October 1918, MCHD.

<sup>45</sup> Robert E. Messersmith biographical file, report by Messersmith, 16 October 1918, MCHD.

2d Battalion, 6th Regiment, supported Messersmith. In his memoir, in reference to Messersmith's retreat, Sellers stated, "He had looked after his men, and the messages he sent back were correct, since this later advance was ridiculous. I know. I advanced there."<sup>46</sup> The withdrawal, called for by Captain DeWitt Peck, played a large role in what became a wholesale rout of the 1st and 2d Battalions. His order triggered the 2d Battalion to begin retreating before the 1st Battalion had finished passing through its lines. However, the failure to stop this retreat inevitably resulted in the actions against Messersmith.

In his investigation report, dated 24 October, Turrill concluded that as elements of the 3d Battalion began retiring through the 2d Battalion lines, the retrograde movement carried with it parts of the 2d Battalion: "In some cases junior officers of 2d Battalion ordered their men to retire, and in others the men apparently went of their own volition." The enemy machine gunners were about "a thousand yards from the front lines" and their heavy fire on the Marines apparently led individual men to run toward the rear.<sup>47</sup>

Under these conditions, Turrill concluded, "it was tactically correct to withdraw" to a better defensive position. However, the error came in permitting "the front and support lines to intermingle and retire" together, thereby causing a chaotic escape toward the rear and the beginning of a general withdrawal of the regiment. Since Major Messersmith commanded the support battalion, immediately to the rear of the assaulting battalion, "he should have held" under the intense conditions until the front line had finished withdrawing through his line. Unfortunately, there were about 250 troops of the 3d and 2d Battalions rapidly moving to the rear under heavy enemy fire in a disorganized manner that amplified the general panic. Major Hamilton and Captain Nelms managed to remedy the situation, averting "a general retreat."<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> William Sellers, James Gregory, and Steven Girard, *C'est La Guerre: The Memoir of Capt. James McBrayer Sellers, USMC* (Oklahoma City, OK: Gray Sparrow Books, 2020), 99.

<sup>47</sup> Robert E. Messersmith biographical file, Results of Investigation into the Conduct of Major E. Messersmith, 24 October 1918, MCHD, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Results of Investigation into the Conduct of Major E. Messersmith, 1.



*Courtesy of Steven C. Girard*  
LtCol Julius S. Turrill, regimental executive officer, 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment.



*Courtesy of Steven C. Girard*  
Col Logan Feland, commanding officer, 5th Regiment.



*Courtesy of Steven C. Girard*

Maj Robert E. Messersmith, commanding officer, 2d Battalion, 5th Regiment.

For his role, the report stated, “Major Messersmith was not awake to the true tactical situation and did not initiate any steps to avert the danger of a panic. Thereby he displayed lack of leadership.” As battalion commander, he was responsible for ensuring his line held as the 3d Battalion withdrew. Instead, he retired about 200 yards, where he ran across Major Hamilton before following Nelms and Hamilton’s lead to restore the combat lines. The investigation also concluded that “Major Messersmith displayed no lack of courage. The cuff of his blouse and his field glass

were penetrated by bullets.”<sup>49</sup> However, due to his inability to prevent the retreat and instead joining it, the 2d Division command, in a 28 November letter, directed 4th Brigade command to ensure Messersmith was ordered to be assigned “to some duty, outside this division, if in command of troops, or not in command of troops if within this division” rather than any disciplinary actions.<sup>50</sup>

This investigation confirmed that a chaotic retreat had in fact taken place on 4 October 1918. It stands as an unfortunate blemish on Messersmith’s successful career, possibly becoming the reason he never received any awards after the war. The disorganized retirement, brought on by the initial overzealous attack at 0600 and lack of timely brigade and divisional leadership, created such an embarrassment to the Marine Corps’ reputation that the events of that day are almost nonexistent in the official record after the war.

The official records of the 2d Division are brief regarding 4 October and the withdrawal. The 2d Division’s journal entry for 4 October only states that “the 2nd Div. attempted to advance but after making a small gain were held up by artillery and machine gun fire upon their flanks. . . . The remainder of the day spent in strengthening the position held by the Division.”<sup>51</sup> This simple statement does not seem to correlate to the next page that contains the 4 October entry of the 2d Division’s war diary, which lists a total of 1,889 men killed, sick, and wounded.<sup>52</sup> The Field Orders for the 5th Regiment skip from 3 October to 18 October.<sup>53</sup> From the divisional field orders there is no mention of the attack, only plans to establish an H-hour.<sup>54</sup> Field messages from the 4th Brigade adju-

<sup>49</sup> Results of Investigation into the Conduct of Major E. Messersmith, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Results of Investigation into the Conduct of Major E. Messersmith, 2.

<sup>51</sup> “Journal of Operations, 2nd Division, October 4, 1918,” in *Records of the Second Division (Regular)*, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: Army War College, 1927), comp. by Capt Cyllburn O. Mattfeldt.

<sup>52</sup> Entry of 4 October 1918, “War Diary of Second Division (Regular), American Expeditionary Forces,” in *Records of the Second Division (Regular)*, vol. 6.

<sup>53</sup> Field Orders 5th Marine Regiment, 3 October 1918, in *Records of the Second Division (Regular)*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Army War College, 1927), comp. by Capt Cyllburn O. Mattfeldt.

<sup>54</sup> Divisional Field Orders, 0400, 4 October 1918, in *Records of the Second Division (Regular)*, vol. 1.

tant for the day do not mention any report of the 5th Regiment falling back but reveals, “We haven’t heard anything about it here. I don’t think we know much about it.”<sup>55</sup> Even Messersmith’s operations report from 11 October simply states, “Moved towards objective under heavy machine gun fire and artillery fire until 2:30 P.M., October 4th. . . . We were forced to retire but held about 4:00 P.M.”<sup>56</sup> The 4 October action does not receive much in-depth attention in the official records of the 2d Division other than the direct messages from attacking Marines. This translates to the recollections of those in charge.

Not only do the records neglect to outline the severity of the 4 October fights, but some commanding officers incorrectly portrayed the battle. This may be due to their costly errors in coordinating the attack. For example, Brigadier General Wendell C. Neville, commanding general of the 4th Brigade, gave a lecture to the students at the Army Center of Artillery Studies on 21 April 1919. Of the attack he stated

At 6:00 a.m., October 4th, orders were issued by the 2nd Division for a further advance, in the direction of Machault-Caurey [*sic*] where a position of resistance was to be established and held. This attack, however, was not carried out until the next day—the French had not advanced on the left and the enemy resistance on that flank was too great to disregard. It had to be “cleaned up” to some extent before the advance could be continued. The next (or nests) causing the most damage were close up to the west of Mont Blanc. These were reconnoitered during the afternoon and evening of October 4th by the 3rd Battalion, Sixth Regiment, and an attack was made in the evening after artillery preparation. This attack was not carried to a conclusion as it

developed that the position was very strong and special preparations would be required if undue loss in man power was to be avoided.<sup>57</sup>

He then moves on to discuss 5 October in detail. The person in charge of the brigade that suffered so severely on 4 October appears to minimize the significance of the day’s events and the 5th Regiment’s actions.

In 1921, the Historical Branch of the War Department’s War Plans Division put together the *Blanc Mont (Meuse-Argonne-Champagne): Monograph No. 9*. It completely glosses over 4 October 1918, making it a mere footnote of the story. The only mention of the day states that the Germans clung “to the western slip of Blanc Mont, from which the 4th Brigade had to dislodge them on October 4.”<sup>58</sup>

As perhaps the most glaring example, in 1922, Major Edwin N. McClellan began writing a series of articles for the *Marine Corps Gazette* on the history of the 4th Brigade during the war. The battles were written in short sections to be continued in consecutive magazine issues. However, once McClellan reached the Battle of Blanc Mont, the story ends on the night of 3 October. The September 1922 issue featured his last article on the battle, which concludes with the 5th Regiment moving up through the 6th Regiment. He summed it up simply: “The Fifth finally connected up with the Third Brigade on the right and with the Sixth Regiment in the rear.” Since McClellan was the officer in charge of the Marine Corps’ Historical Section at the time, the sudden end to the articles and exclusion of 4 October onward is a mystery that may suggest a reluctance to discuss the events of that day.<sup>59</sup>

Likewise, in this idea of downplaying the actions on 4 October, Major General Lejeune brushed over

<sup>57</sup> Wendell C. Neville, “Blanc Mont: Lecture Delivered on Infantry in Recent Operations” (lecture at Army Center for Artillery Studies, Fort Sill, OK, 21 April 1919).

<sup>58</sup> *Blanc Mont (Meuse-Argonne-Champagne): Monograph No. 9* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1922), 4.

<sup>59</sup> Maj Edwin N. McClellan, “The Battle at Blanc Mont Ridge,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 7, no. 1 (March 1922): 1–21; Maj Edwin N. McClellan, “The Battle at Blanc Mont Ridge,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 7, no. 2 (June 1922): 206–11; and Maj Edwin N. McClellan, “The Battle at Blanc Mont Ridge,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 7, no. 3 (September 1922): 287–88.

<sup>55</sup> “Field Message, 2:40 p.m., October 4, 1918, Adjutant 4th Brigade.”

<sup>56</sup> Robert Messersmith, Operations Report 1–8, 11 October 1918, in *Records of the Second Division (Regular)*, vol. 7 (Washington, DC: Army War College, 1927).

the conflict in his 1930 memoir *The Reminiscences of a Marine*. He acknowledged that the 5th Regiment made an advance through heavy machine-gun fire along its front, left flank, and left rear and that it continued until being forced to halt. He then mentions Major Hamilton's skillful command in stopping a German counterattack that afternoon.<sup>60</sup> Lejeune's book was for public consumption and not an official history, but the exemption of such a brutal day in Marine Corps history plays a part in not acknowledging the day's failures. The official records and the works of those in charge on 4 October downplay or exclude the bloody combat that the 5th Regiment faced. Continuing this trend, *History of Second Battalion, 5th Regiment U.S. Marines, June 1st 1917–January 1st 1919* and *Over the Top with the 18th Co., 5th Regt., U.S. Marines: A History* both briefly touch on the attack by simply recounting that they pushed forward under tremendous fire from the flanks and fell back to a better defensive position.<sup>61</sup>

Fortunately for historians, the firsthand accounts of those who served on the front lines, like those found in the ABMC statements used in this article, always mention that fateful day. Their horrific experiences could not be forgotten. Their accounts reveal the hell that was 4 October 1918 and illuminate a new perspective of the Marine Corps' participation in World War I.

## Conclusions

The attacks on 4 October by the 4th Brigade and its 5th and 6th Regiments have become a footnote in World War I Marine Corps history. These blunders bled the 2d Infantry Division and its Marine brigade. Inexplicable issues plagued the 5th Regiment, such as the change of H-hour to 0600, which started the 5th

Regiment's attack several hours before the planned time. The failures of divisional and brigade command to fully comprehend the status of the front lines resulted in a bungled attack that lacked proper preparation. The 5th Regiment attacked without artillery or aerial cover. The overzealous Marines extended their lines into a compromised position inundated by fire on all sides. This heavy fire decimated the Marine ranks, leading to a chaotic retreat that nearly routed the entire regiment. Finally, the officers in divisional and brigade headquarters responsible for the debacle glossed over and attempted to erase the embarrassment of 4 October from the official and public records after the war. By pretending it did not happen, the Marine Corps successfully buried its biggest failure of World War I.

Despite becoming the bloodiest day of the war for the Marine Corps, the actions of 4 October are very commonly bypassed in retellings of the battle on Blanc Mont Ridge. It is not until the last few decades that the events of that day garnered a more detailed discussion in Marine Corps histories. The failure of recognition fell on a calamity of errors with the failure of command to properly coordinate the attack, overzealous Marines, a chaotic retreat led by several officers of the 5th Regiment's 2d Battalion, and a lack of acknowledgement after the war. There is much to be learned from other major battles of the Great War, including the missteps and failures of leadership at Blanc Mont. The rigorous study of history demands we investigate failures as well as herald victories. Admitting failures of the past—embracing them—reveals the true valor and sacrifice of the Marines and the lessons bought for a terrible price.

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<sup>60</sup> MajGen John A. Lejeune, *The Reminiscences of a Marine* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Association, 1990), 160.

<sup>61</sup> Nathaniel Hardin Massie, *Official History of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Regiment, U.S. Marines, June 1st 1917–January 1st 1919* (Neuwied, Germany: n.p., 1919); and Cpl H. B. Field and Sgt H. G. James, *Over the Top with the 18th Co., 5th Regt. U.S. Marines: A History* (Neuwied, Germany: Louis Heuserche Buchdruckerei, 1919), 25–26.

# The “Devil-May-Care Song of the Leathernecks”

A HISTORY OF THE “MARINES’ HYMN,” 1920–47

by Lauren Bowers

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**Abstract:** From 1920 to 1947, the “Marines’ Hymn” was a familiar sound over the radio waves and in motion pictures. Beyond its popular appeal, however, the hymn was scrutinized by Marine Corps leadership under the reforms of Major General Commandant John A. Lejeune, subjected to a prolonged ownership dispute, updated during a world war, and given an official birthday. This article continues the author’s research on the topic and examines these important milestones in the history of the “Marines’ Hymn” and the conflicts that arose as Marine Corps leadership attempted to maintain and promote one dignified official version that would foster a positive public image for the increasingly professional Corps.

**Keywords:** “Marines’ Hymn,” copyright, Major Joseph C. Fegan Jr., Major General Ben H. Fuller, First Sergeant L. Z. Phillips, Brigadier General Robert L. Denig, Lieutenant General Thomas Holcomb, Marine Corps Aviation

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## Introduction

The early history of the “Marines’ Hymn,” from mysterious nineteenth-century beginnings to respected anthem of the Marine Corps, culminated in the authorization and copyright of an official version of the song in the summer of 1919, largely due to the efforts of First Sergeant L. Z. Phillips, first leader of the Quantico Post Band.<sup>1</sup> While the story of those years focused on the development of the song itself, the next chapter of the hymn’s life was one

that saw Marine Corps leadership take a more active role in exerting control over the popular song to help maintain a positive public image for the increasingly professional Corps.

Using documents stored at the Marine Band Library in Washington, DC, and the Marine Corps History Division’s Historical Resources Branch at Quantico, Virginia, as a foundation, this article tells the story of the “Marines’ Hymn” from 1920 to 1947. During this time, the hymn was a familiar sound over the radio waves and in motion pictures, and it was a popular topic in local newspapers that offered readers a brief history of the hymn and colorful commentary about its appeal, as seen in one example from July 1934.

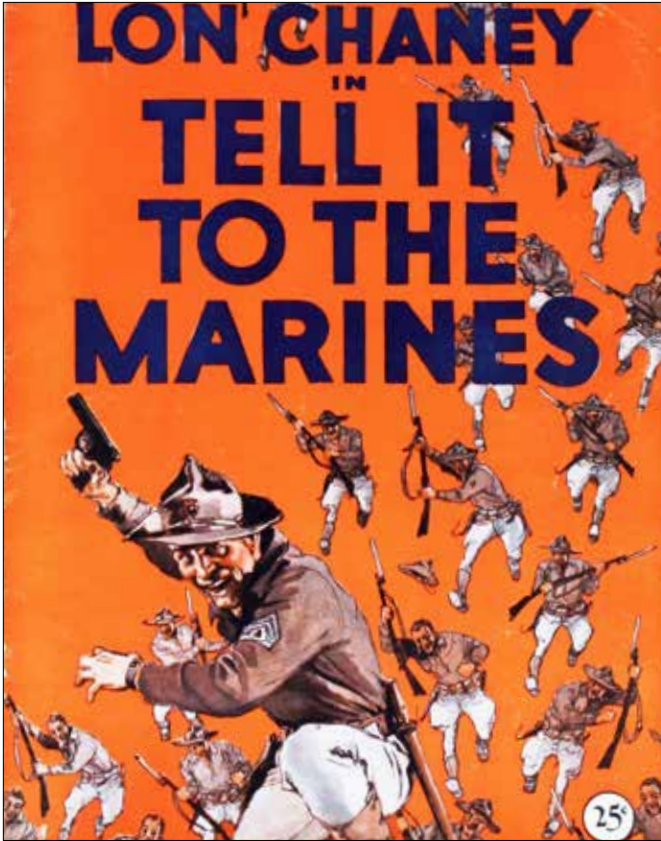
When played with a dirgelike cadence the hymn has all the impressiveness of a solemn requiem sung in a vaulted cathedral. Pepped up to modern jazz tempo, it becomes the devil-may-care song of the Leathernecks. . . . The

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<sup>1</sup>For the first part of this investigation into the history of the hymn, see Lauren Bowers, “A Song with ‘Dash’ and ‘Pep’: a History of the ‘Marines’ Hymn’ to 1919,” *Marine Corps History* 6, no. 2 (Winter 2020): 5–22, <https://doi.org/10.35318/mch.2020060201>.



Courtesy of the National Museum of the Marine Corps Program for MGM's 1926 film *Tell It to the Marines*, produced in cooperation with the Marine Corps.

words, which make no pretense to a higher poetical value than mere doggerel, express the spirit of the sea soldiers as only their unknown marine authors could express it.<sup>2</sup>

In these years, the hymn was also scrutinized under the reforms of Major General Commandant John A. Lejeune, subjected to an ownership dispute, updated during a world war, and given an official birthday. This article examines these important milestones in the history of the “Marines’ Hymn” and the conflicts that arose as Marine Corps leadership attempted to maintain and promote one dignified official version.

## Major Joseph C. Fegan’s Quest for a Dignified Hymn, 1920–29

In the immediate aftermath of World War I, the Marine Corps was faced with a significantly reduced budget and an American public weary of battles and bloodshed. A large-scale reorganization of the Marine Corps followed, under the leadership of Commandant Lejeune (1 July 1920–4 March 1929). Lejeune’s priorities included fostering a positive public image of the Corps, and throughout the 1920s the “Marines’ Hymn” played a small but consistent role in furthering this goal. In an article celebrating the 150th birthday of the Marine Corps in November 1924, the hymn was used to show the affection Marines had toward the “iron disciplinarians” in the officer ranks. It included the following verse honoring Major General Joseph H. Pendleton, which was said to be sung by “Uncle Joe’s nephews”:

From the Halls of Montezuma  
To the shores of Tripoli  
We fight our country’s battles  
On the land as on the sea.  
The Marines in Nicaragua  
Were the boys to fill the bill,  
And Uncle Joe he was the lad  
Took Coyotepe Hill.<sup>3</sup>

In 1926, the hymn was featured in the MGM film *Tell It to the Marines*, which was produced after Lejeune signed a contract with the studio for “exclusive rights to make all feature pictures of the marines” for one year.<sup>4</sup> On 23 September 1927, the Victor Company made a recording of the Marine Band performing the hymn during a tour. The record was made on behalf of *Leatherneck* magazine and was given as a premium for customers who purchased a three-year subscription. It featured Marine Corps Band leader Captain Taylor

<sup>2</sup> Loren T. Casey, “Sea Soldiers’ Song Is Mystery Ballad,” *Everett Press* (Everett, PA), 20 July 1934, 4.

<sup>3</sup> John Dickenson Sherman, “U.S.M.C.,” *Press Herald* (Pine Grove, PA), 31 October 1924, 6.

<sup>4</sup> “Gets Sole Rights to Film Marines,” *New York Times*, 2 February 1926, 7.

Branson singing the first two verses solo, and the entire band singing the final verse.<sup>5</sup>

In September 1925, Lejeune named Major Joseph C. Fegan as the first Marine Corps publicity officer at Headquarters Marine Corps. In this capacity, Fegan served as the primary point of contact for any matters that could be used for publicity to raise the profile of the Corps.<sup>6</sup> On 9 October 1928, Major Fegan sent a memorandum to Lejeune that responded to Lejeune's inquiries about the origins of the hymn and what role it might play in the future. Fegan highlighted the usefulness of the hymn by recruiters and recommended that the Recruiting Bureau print the verses on a leaflet for general distribution, as well as publish sheet music editions for use by military and civilian bands. In addition, he specified that "on the front cover of the sheet music the story of the hymn could also be told in picture, and on the back cover a short historical sketch of its origin could be placed." On a broader scale, he recommended that "the origin and history of the hymn be included in the training of recruits, and that every member of the Corps likewise be urged to learn it."<sup>7</sup> Although several printed editions of both the lyrics and music of the hymn had been published before this time, Fegan's recommendation was fairly innovative. His idea of printing leaflets that would serve the dual purposes of teaching the lyrics and history of the hymn reflected both Lejeune's goal of raising the public image of the Marine Corps and the increased emphasis on having the Corps research and publish its own history.

In the same memo, Fegan recommended "the inclusion of considerations governing the respect to be shown the hymn by our personnel when it is being sung or played." Specifically, he argued that "to perpetuate its dignity our personnel should be required



Historical Resources Branch, Marine Corps History Division  
Maj Joseph C. Fegan, appointed the first publicity officer at Headquarters Marine Corps in September 1925.

to show their respect for it by standing and remaining uncovered when it is sung or played at mass meetings or on official occasions."<sup>8</sup> Anecdotal evidence from the 1910s shows that standing uncovered during the playing of the hymn was already commonplace, but now Fegan sought to make it official protocol.<sup>9</sup>

Regarding the history of the hymn, Fegan agreed with previous assessments by leaders of the Marine Band that the music was a "steal" from the 1867 edition of the operetta *Geneviève de Brabant* by Jacques Offenbach. He also included the lyrics of three verses of the "Marines' Hymn" that he determined were "as nearly the original ones as any." These verses are recognizable as the ones used today in the official version. One exception was Fegan's use of "admiration of

<sup>5</sup> Capt Taylor Branson to Edward B. Marks, 14 January 1928, Hymn subject file, Historical Resources Branch, Marine Corps History Division (MCHD), Quantico, VA; and List of Marine Corps Band recordings, Marines' Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library, Washington, DC.

<sup>6</sup> Colin Colbourn, "Esprit de Marine Corps: The Making of the Modern Marine Corps through Public Relations, 1898–1945" (PhD diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2018), 152.

<sup>7</sup> Maj Joseph C. Fegan, memo to MajGen Cmdt John Lejeune, 9 October 1928, Hymn subject file, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD, hereafter Fegan memo to Lejeune.

<sup>8</sup> Fegan memo to Lejeune. The term *remaining uncovered* refers to removing hats or covers.

<sup>9</sup> R. B. Stuart to Victor Talking Machine Company, 17 May 1918, Marines' Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library; and Letter from Lt Merritt Edson, *Springfield (VT) Reporter*, 1 August 1918, 6.



the nation, we're the finest ever seen" in the fifth and sixth lines of the first verse, rather than "first to fight for right and freedom, and to keep our honor clean."<sup>10</sup> The "admiration of the nation" line had been the usual lyric in the beginning of the twentieth century, until "first to fight" was incorporated in 1917 during the nationwide recruiting drive at the start of the U.S. involvement in World War I and quickly became the preferred version.<sup>11</sup>

The remainder of Fegan's memo addressed the content of the hymn's lyrics: "Our hymn has become one of the popular patriotic songs and we must keep it on a dignified plane. We cannot permit verses or parodies uncomplimentary to countries in which we have served to be recognized."<sup>12</sup> Although he does not elaborate on this point, he was almost certainly referring to the following verse, which had been circulating for many years:

From the pest-hole of Cavite  
To the ditch at Panama,  
You will find them very needy  
Of marines—that's what we are.  
We're the watchdogs of a pile of coal,  
Or we dig a magazine.  
Though our job-lot they are manifold,  
Who would not be a Marine?

Major Henry C. Davis claimed credit for writing this verse while stationed at Camp Meyer, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, in 1911, and it had been included in several publications of the hymn's lyrics, as early as the 1914 edition of the Publicity Bureau's pamphlet, *The Marines in Rhyme, Prose, and Cartoon*.<sup>13</sup> It was not included in the 1919 version of the hymn authorized by Major General Commandant George Barnett, and it seemingly fell out of favor during the 1920s.<sup>14</sup> The fate

of this verse was addressed directly in a *Leatherneck* article in April 1926 about the history of the hymn:

This verse has been dropped for obvious reasons. Cavite is no longer a "pest hole," whatever it may have been years ago. The ditch at Panama has been completed for years, and, apart from Coco Solo [U.S. Navy submarine base], there are few Marines in that vicinity. The piles of coal used by the Navy have been largely superseded in recent years by oil tanks, and the verse doesn't seem to fit present circumstances.<sup>15</sup>

Fegan's recommendation to Lejeune echoed this sentiment, and he argued that undignified verses from the past should be dropped from the hymn and new ones should be discouraged in the future. To enforce this position, he further suggested that the hymn should be protected by being granted an official standing within the Corps.

Recommendations: That a regular Marine Corps order be issued on this matter in order that it may have an official standing, thereby protecting it from being subject to ridiculous parodies. The adoption of the three verses as given herein, and that no new verses or parodies be permitted.<sup>16</sup>

Although Fegan's desire to have the Marine Corps represented by a song with lyrics on a "dignified plane" was shared by many others, not everyone believed the "Marines' Hymn" was the right song for the job. In response to Fegan's memo, Assistant to the Commandant Brigadier General Ben H. Fuller (who went on to serve as Commandant from 9 July 1930 to 28 February 1934) gave a very different opinion about the hymn.

Both the music and the words lack artistic merit and I do not think they

<sup>10</sup> Fegan memo to Lejeune.

<sup>11</sup> For more information about the addition of "first to fight" to the hymn, see Bowers, "A Song with 'Dash' and 'Pep,'" 12–14.

<sup>12</sup> Fegan memo to Lejeune.

<sup>13</sup> *The Book of Navy Songs* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1930), 126–27; and *The Marines in Rhyme, Prose, and Cartoon*, 2d ed. (New York: U.S. Marine Corps Recruiting Publicity Bureau, 1914–15), 4, Hymn subject file, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD.

<sup>14</sup> *The Marines' Hymn* (Quantico, VA: Leatherneck, 1919), box 54, M1646, LCCN 2014561867, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

<sup>15</sup> Hash Mark, "Whence Came the Marine's Hymn?," *Leatherneck*, 10 April 1926, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Fegan memo to Lejeune.

should be dignified by formal official recognition. The whole composition is boastful and more appropriate to convivial gatherings than to serious occasions, although suitable enough to be sung by all marines as a marching song and at games. I am not in favor of showing the same respect for it that is shown to a national air, nor do I think it should be called a "Hymn."<sup>17</sup>

This negative assessment was likely based on Fuller's early experiences with the song. In his memo, he acknowledged that he personally heard an earlier version of it aboard the steam screw frigate USS *Wabash* (1855) in 1892 and he then carried it to the Philippines in 1899, where additional verses were added by various Marines.<sup>18</sup> Although the song had been increasingly legitimized in the intervening years, it is understandable that someone from Fuller's generation would not view it with the same reverence that Major Fegan was now recommending. However, Fegan's stance on the lyrics prevailed, and on 15 October 1928, a Marine Corps Headquarters bulletin was released stating that the three verses included in Fegan's memo from the previous week "should be continued without addition or change."<sup>19</sup>

Fegan continued to work toward official recognition of the "Marines' Hymn" and on 1 April 1929, less than one month into Major General Wendell C. Neville's tenure as Commandant, Fegan sent another memo on this issue. Specifically, after researching the history of the hymn with the Register of Copyrights, he recommended that "the Marines Hymn should be copyrighted in the name of the Major General Commandant." He argued that this step would give the Marine Corps official ownership of the song, and override the previous copyright of August 1919, done at the instigation of First Sergeant L. Z. Phil-

lips and *Leatherneck* newspaper, based at Quantico.<sup>20</sup> It is unclear whether this recommendation by Fegan was officially acted on. Although 1929 is frequently cited as the year in which the hymn was copyrighted, no documents confirming a copyright registration in 1929 were found in preparation of this article. In addition, when music publishers requested permission to print sheet music copies of the "Marines' Hymn" in the 1930s and 1940s, the official Marine Corps response was to insist that the credit be given as "Copyright 1919 by U.S. Marine Corps," with no mention of a 1929 copyright.<sup>21</sup>

Major General Commandant Neville responded to Fegan's memo by issuing another authorization of the lyrics, making a minor correction to restore the "first to fight for right and freedom and to keep our honor clean" lyrics in the first verse, which had been officially authorized a decade earlier by Major General Commandant Barnett.<sup>22</sup> In addition, he requested that 10,000 copies of the hymn be printed for recruiting publicity as soon as possible, with the first thousand copies to be sent to the leader of the Marine Band.<sup>23</sup> This practice of distributing free copies of the music and lyrics became well-known, and several articles advertising the availability of such copies at recruiting offices, and mentioning their popularity among the general public, appeared in local newspapers across the country throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s.<sup>24</sup>

Major Fegan's efforts in the late 1920s to adopt a standard version of the song and an equally dignified protocol during its playing reflected Lejeune's priori-

<sup>17</sup> AstCmdt Ben Fuller, memo to MajGen Cmdt John Lejeune, 11 October 1928, Marines' Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library, hereafter Fuller memo to Lejeune.

<sup>18</sup> Fuller memo to Lejeune.

<sup>19</sup> Headquarters bulletin, 15 October 1928, Hymn subject file, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD.

<sup>20</sup> Maj Joseph C. Fegan, memo to the MajGen Cmdt Wendell Neville, 1 April 1929, Marines' Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library, hereafter Fegan memo to Neville.

<sup>21</sup> The first known example of this wording is in a letter from MajGen Cmdt Ben Fuller to L. Z. Phillips, 11 August 1931, quoted in MajGen Cmdt (acting) A. A. Vandegrift to Mr. Herman Fuchs, *Pathé News*, 18 June 1941, Hymn subject file, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD, hereafter Vandegrift letter to Fuchs.

<sup>22</sup> MajGen Cmdt Wendell Neville to the Officer in Charge, Marine Corps Recruiting Bureau, Philadelphia, 24 April 1929, Hymn subject file, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD, hereafter Neville letter to Recruiting Bureau, Philadelphia.

<sup>23</sup> Neville letter to Recruiting Bureau, Philadelphia.

<sup>24</sup> Casey, "Sea Soldiers' Song Is Mystery Ballad," 4; "Who Wants Free Copy of U.S. Marine Hymn?," *Courier-Post* (Camden, NJ), 25 June 1936, 33; and Sgt Richard C. Seither, "Marine Corps Hymn," *Texas Gazette* (Saint Joseph, LA), 6 March 1942, 1.

ties of increased standardization and professionalism throughout the Service. They also reflected Fegan's own vision of the hymn's role within the Marine Corps. In part, his recommendations to teach the origin and history of the song during the training of recruits and to adopt the three verses that he described as "nearly the original ones as any" indicate a reverence for history and a desire to return to the earliest version of the song. This could also be the reasoning behind his choice to omit two recent well-known contributions to the hymn. Namely, the "first to fight for right and freedom" lyric in the first verse introduced in 1917 and the verse about the Château-Thierry campaign that had been included in the official 1919 version and continued to appear intermittently for years afterward.<sup>25</sup>

However, Fegan was also clearly motivated by more contemporary concerns. His stated objection to lyrics with uncomplimentary parodies makes it clear that his choice to omit the "pest-hole of Cavite" verse was based on considerations of public image rather than historical accuracy. When taken together, therefore, Fegan's recommended version of the hymn's lyrics—retaining early verses, omitting undignified parodies, and removing references to recent campaigns—may be interpreted less as a desire to return to the hymn's origins, and more as a push toward a dignified, timeless song that would remain relevant to future generations. Aside from Neville's directive to restore the "first to fight" lyric, Fegan's recommendations were adopted, and the verses referencing the "pest-hole of Cavite" and Château-Thierry soon fell out of use. However, Fegan's concerns about the proliferation of unauthorized parody verses and potential copyright issues pertaining to the hymn were not adequately addressed by the end of the 1920s and they remained points of contention into the 1940s.

## Will the Real Owner of the "Marines' Hymn" Please Stand Up, 1929–42

Major Fegan's recommendation in 1929 that the hymn should be copyrighted in the name of the Commandant was based on his specific concern "that copyright can be sold, and in case [First Sergeant L. Z.] Phillips, who is now discharged from the Marine Corps, desires to dispose of the copyright [of 1919], it will make it embarrassing for us."<sup>26</sup> Fegan's worries proved valid, and the issue did indeed result in embarrassment and confusion as Phillips and others staked their claims to the song in the following years. Much of the dispute likely stemmed from confusion about the complexities of copyright law. Specifically, although Phillips had been a driving force behind the copyright and was given official credit for the "words and music," the copyright certificate registered with the Library of Congress on 19 August 1919 clearly stated that the "Marines' Hymn" was registered in the name of the U.S. Marine Corps, Quantico, Virginia.<sup>27</sup> However, it is unclear if either the Marine Corps or the Commandant, as suggested by Fegan, would have been able to claim legal ownership, since section 7 of the Copyright Act of 1909 stated that "no copyright shall subsist . . . in any publication of the United States Government, or any reprint, in whole or in part, thereof."<sup>28</sup> To be clear, this article makes no assertions about the veracity of any claims pertaining to U.S. copyright law by any of the parties involved; rather, the intent is to offer the arguments of each party as they were originally presented and to show how this prolonged dispute led directly to a change in official Marine Corps policy regarding the use of the hymn.

First Sergeant Phillips served as the first Quantico Post bandmaster from the time of his enlistment at the age of 50 in September 1917 until he was honorably discharged at his own request in May 1922. Be-

<sup>25</sup> Later references to this verse include Second Leader of Marine Corps Band to Mr. Andrew Ontke, 28 March 1924, Marines' Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library; and "Legation Guard News," 1930 *Legation Guard Annual*, Beijing, China, Hymn subject file, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD.

<sup>26</sup> Fegan memo to Neville.

<sup>27</sup> L. Z. Phillips, "The Marine's Hymn," Certificate of Copyright Registration, Copyright Office of the U.S., Library of Congress, E 457132, 19 August 1919, Marines' Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library. For more information about the 1919 copyright, see Bowers, "A Song with 'Dash' and 'Pep,'" 18–21.

<sup>28</sup> Copyright Act of 1909: An Act to Amend and Consolidate the Acts Respecting Copyright, Pub. L. No. 60-349, 35 Stat. 1075 (1909).

fore enlisting, he owned the Dutch Mill restaurant in Cleveland, Ohio, a “splendid business that netted him \$10,000 a year,” but after leaving the Corps he supported himself and his wife by working at the Southern Music Company and Sacred Music Company in Washington, DC, and with a Marine Corps pension of \$30 per month.<sup>29</sup> In 1931, he wrote to the office of the Commandant requesting permission “to print and sell copies of the Marines’ Hymn as long as I live” with the acknowledgement that the Marine Corps would own his copyright after his death. He was motivated by financial need, stating “this may help me get a little of the money back I lost in helping Uncle Sam when he was in need; now that I am in need will Uncle Sam help me?”<sup>30</sup>

In his reply sent 11 August 1931, Major General Commandant Fuller minimized Phillips’s involvement in the 1919 copyright by reaffirming that the copyright was already owned by the U.S. Marine Corps, and that the words and music predated Phillips’s time in the Marines. He also gave formal consent for Phillips to print and sell the song as sheet music, at his own risk and expense, provided that he used the authorized version of the lyrics and included the credit line “Copyright 1919 by U.S. Marine Corps.” More specifically, Fuller stated that “the consent was not exclusive, was not transferrable, and might be revoked at any time.”<sup>31</sup> Phillips acted quickly after receiving permission, as seen in a December 1931 article in *Metronome* magazine:

At last the Marine Hymn, official song of the USMC, has been made available to the public, and it is now on sale generally throughout the US and foreign countries. This was brought

about when permission was granted to the compiler, L. Z. Phillips of Washington, to print the famous hymn. He in turn has granted exclusive selling rights as well as mechanical and sound rights to Edward B. Marks. Phillips has been granted special permission to print the stirring song because of his work in compiling it and in unselfishly copyrighting it in the name of the Marine Corps instead of himself. Strict orders from Marine headquarters are that the melody and words must not be distorted in any way since the hymn is sacred and traditional with the US Marines.<sup>32</sup>

The article’s claim that Phillips was authorized to grant “exclusive selling rights” to a publishing company contradicted Fuller’s letter. The assertion that the hymn was available to the general public “at last” is also confusing, given that multiple versions were printed from 1917 to 1920 and Fuller had recently ordered the production of 10,000 copies to be distributed for recruitment purposes. One copy of sheet music published by Phillips is housed at the Marine Corps Band Library. It is undated, but features a portrait of Major General Fuller on the cover, suggesting that it was printed sometime between August 1931 and the end of Fuller’s tenure as Commandant in February 1934. The credit line “Copyright by the USMC, 19 August 1919” appears as directed, as does the acknowledgement that Phillips printed the edition “by Special permission of the Copyright owner.” The edition cost 30 cents and included the three verses approved by Fuller in 1929 at the request of Major Fegan.

The publishing agreement between the Marine Corps and Phillips hit its first snag when Fuller received a letter dated 30 March 1932 from Russell Doubleday, the vice president of Doubleday, Doran, and Company, regarding the firm’s desire to include the

<sup>29</sup> Arthur Tregina, “How the Popular Post Band Was Recruited and Formed,” *Quantico Leatherneck* 1, no. 12 (9 February 1918): 3; as quoted in MajGen Cmdt Ben H. Fuller to L. Z. Phillips, 31 March 1932, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library; and To Appoint L. Z. Phillips a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps, H.R. 9129, 74th Cong. (1935), hereafter H.R. 9129.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in BGen Edward A. Ostermann, memo to LtGen Cmdt Thomas Holcomb, 18 February 1942, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library, hereafter Ostermann memo to Holcomb.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Ostermann memo to Holcomb; and quoted in Vandergriff letter to Fuchs.

<sup>32</sup> “Marks Gets Marine Hymn,” *Metronome*, December 1931, 33, Hymn subject file, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD, hereafter “Marks Gets Marine Hymn.”

*3rd Copy - Captain L. A. Dessez.*

*Impresso -*

*L. Z. Phillips*

APPROVED EDITION

# THE MARINES' HYMN



*"The Marines have  
the situation*

*landed and have  
well in hand"*

RETURN TO  
U. S. MARINE BAND  
LIBRARY

MAJOR GENERAL B. H. FULLER  
Commandant, United States Marine Corps

Copyright by U. S. Marine Corps, August 19, 1919

From the Halls of Montezuma  
To the shores of Tripoli,  
We fight our country's battles  
On the land as on the Sea.  
Admiration of the Nation,  
We're the finest ever seen  
And we glory in the title of  
UNITED STATES MARINES.

Price  
30c

Our flag's unfurled to every breeze  
From dawn to setting sun,  
We have fought in every clime and place  
Where we could take a gun;  
In the snows of far off Northern lands  
And in sunny tropic scenes,  
You will find us always on the job—  
THE UNITED STATES MARINES.

SEMPER

FIDELIS

Here's health to you and to our Corps  
Which we are proud to serve,  
In many a strife we have fought for life  
And never lost our nerve;  
If the Army and the Navy  
Ever look on Heaven's scenes,  
They will find the streets are guarded by  
THE UNITED STATES MARINES.

By Special permission of the Copyright owner I am permitted to print and sell  
this copy to the public

Address, L. Z. PHILLIPS  
1618 H STREET, N. W. WASHINGTON, D. C.

Marine Band Library  
Cover of the "Marines' Hymn" sheet music printed by L. Z. Phillips, ca. 1931-34, featuring a portrait of MajGen Cmdt Ben H. Fuller, who had once criticized the song as "boastful" and "lack[ing] artistic merit."

“Marines’ Hymn” in its new publication, *The Book of Navy Songs*.<sup>33</sup> In this letter, Doubleday stated that he was also seeking permission from L. Z. Phillips, who had recently sent a letter to Doubleday in which he asserted that he copyrighted this song at his own expense in the name of the U.S. Marine Corps and called himself the “owner of the copyright.”<sup>34</sup> The following day, Fuller sent a stern letter to Phillips, admonishing him for making misleading claims.

This statement that you are the owner of the copyright is not in accordance with the facts. The Marines’ Hymn is copyrighted in the name of the United States Marine Corps and the only interest you have in it is the revocable, non-exclusive permission to print and sell the Hymn as sheet music on your own account. It is requested that you correct the impression you have given Doubleday, Doran and Company in this matter and that you desist from such practice in the future.<sup>35</sup>

One week later, Major General John T. Myers responded to Doubleday’s request and gave them permission to print the authorized version of the “Marines’ Hymn” and made a point to correct the misinformation the company had been given by Phillips: “With reference to Mr. L. Z. Phillips, the only interest which he has in the Marines’ Hymn is a revocable non-exclusive permission given him by this office in August last to print and sell the hymn as sheet music on his own account.”<sup>36</sup>

Phillips’s initial reaction to this episode is unknown, but his last act regarding his involvement with the “Marines’ Hymn” three years later can only be seen as in direct defiance of Fuller’s letters from August 1931 and March 1932. To put this action in context,

it is important to note that in 1935 Phillips was still experiencing financial difficulties, to the extent that he wrote to Assistant Secretary of the Navy Henry L. Roosevelt for assistance. As a result of this letter, on 13 August 1935, Congressman Martin L. Sweeney (D-OH) introduced bill H.R. 9129 to the first session of the 74th Congress, proposing that Phillips “be appointed a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps and be immediately placed on the retired list with the rank and pay of a second lieutenant.” This action would have increased Phillips’s pension from \$30 to \$93 per month.<sup>37</sup> In response, the Office of the Commandant acknowledged Phillips’s excellent record but denied the request due to its cost to the government of \$1,125 per year.<sup>38</sup>

Only two months later, on 14 October, Phillips signed a document confirming the sale of the copyright of the “Marines’ Hymn” to the Edward B. Marks Music Corporation of New York for the sum of \$150. This transaction was officially recorded in the U.S. Copyright Office on 18 October and gave the Marks Corporation ownership of “the musical composition, words and music, entitled ‘The Marines’ Hymn’ written and composed by L. Z. Phillips,” including three copyrighted versions. It further specified that the Marks Corporation would now hold the publishing rights and “all rights to all royalties accruing and all copyrights upon the same, and the right to obtain any and all copyrights for the same and all renewals and extensions thereof.”<sup>39</sup>

Considering that this document acknowledged that the existing copyright entries for the “Marines’ Hymn” were “in the name of the United States Marine Corps,” it is puzzling that the Copyright Office permitted this transaction to go through with Phillips being listed as the sole legal “assignor.” Also, by 1935, Phillips had been told multiple times by Marine Corps leadership that the copyright was not his to sell, and yet he proceeded to anyway, selling the song

<sup>33</sup> Russell Doubleday to MajGen Cmdt Ben Fuller, 30 March 1932, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library, hereafter Doubleday letter to Fuller.

<sup>34</sup> Doubleday letter to Fuller.

<sup>35</sup> MajGen Cmdt Ben Fuller to L. Z. Phillips, 31 March 1932, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

<sup>36</sup> MajGen J. T. Myers to Doubleday, Doran, 6 April 1932, Hymn subject file, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD.

<sup>37</sup> H.R. 9129.

<sup>38</sup> MajGen Cmdt John Russell to Judge Advocate General, 17 August 1935, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

<sup>39</sup> L. Z. Phillips to Edward B. Marks Music Corporation, Assignment of Copyright (E457132, E29678, E29679), Copyright Office of the U.S., 18 October 1935, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

that he had once published “through patriotic motives” for a sum equivalent to \$2,990 in 2021 money.<sup>40</sup> Fortunately for Phillips, his decision appears to have gone unnoticed by the Marine Corps for the remainder of his life, and the permission granted to him to publish copies of the hymn was never revoked.<sup>41</sup> He died on 22 August 1936 and was buried with military honors, rendered by a detachment of Marines from the Marine Barracks, Washington, DC, at Arlington National Cemetery three days later.<sup>42</sup>

Legally or not, by the end of 1935, the Marks Corporation believed itself to be the sole owner of the “Marines’ Hymn” with the right to publish and profit from it as the company saw fit. It had been interested in the hymn for several years by this point, as seen in a letter dated 12 January 1928 from the head of the company, Edward B. Marks, to Captain Taylor Branson, leader of the Marine Band, inquiring about the hymn and its copyright status.<sup>43</sup> By December 1931, the Marks Corporation had teamed up with L. Z. Phillips, as noted in the *Metronome* article quoted above, which stated that Phillips had decided to work with the company “because of its wide and lengthy experience in the field of exploiting and fostering songs without in any way cheapening them.”<sup>44</sup> During the next six years, the Marks Corporation registered six copyright entries of various arrangements of the “Marines’ Hymn,” including an arrangement for band, one for vocal quartet and trio, and a fox-trot version credited to L. Z. Phillips.<sup>45</sup>

The sale of the “Marines’ Hymn” copyright from L. Z. Phillips to the Marks Corporation in October 1935 was brought to the attention of Marine Corps

leadership in 1941 by the Pathé News organization. By this time, Pathé had used the “Marines’ Hymn” in several newsreel stories, always with express permission of the Commandant.<sup>46</sup> However, in a letter dated 4 June 1941, Herman Fuchs, music editor of Pathé News, informed Brigadier General Alexander A. Vandegrift, Acting Commandant, that an attorney of the Marks Corporation had recently sent a letter to Pathé claiming that “[the Marks Corporation] is the copyright owner of this song through assignment of the full title from L. Z. Phillips. Consequently, they deny ownership by the Marine Corps and demand payment from [Pathé] for having used ‘The Marines’ Hymn’ in connection with Marine Corps stories.”<sup>47</sup> Vandegrift responded on 18 June, informing Fuchs that Phillips had been involved with the 1919 copyright and had received permission to publish the song at his own expense in 1931 but had no further claim.<sup>48</sup> Armed with this official response, Fuchs sent a stern reply to the Marks Corporation’s attorney, Arthur E. Garmaize, advising him that “it would serve no useful purpose” to continue arguing over the copyright of the hymn, as it had always been in the name of the Marine Corps, “as recognized not only in the Marine Corps’ permission to Phillips of August 11, 1931, to print and sell, but also in Phillips’ assignment to the Edward B. Marks Music Corporation of August [sic October] 14, 1935.” Fuchs further warned that if the Marks Corporation wished to pursue its claim, “in any such fight, we [Pathé] appear to have the backing of the United States Marine Corps.”<sup>49</sup>

Despite this warning, the copyright issue reared its head once more. In early 1942, Leonard D. Callahan of the Society of European Stage Authors and Composers (SESAC) approached Brigadier General Edward A. Ostermann, adjutant and inspector of the Marine Corps, for permission to publish an arrangement of the “Marines’ Hymn.” During his conversa-

<sup>40</sup> Post Cmdr, Quantico, John T. Myers to MajGen Cmdt George Barnett, 18 June 1919, as quoted in a memo to Gen Lane, 2 April 1929, Hymn Subject File, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD. The equivalent value of the copyright sale was calculated using U.S. Inflation Calculator, accessed 24 August 2021.

<sup>41</sup> Ostermann memo to Holcomb.

<sup>42</sup> SgtMaj W. T. Ramberg, memo to Maj R. H. Jeschke, 25 August 1936, L. Z. Phillips, U.S. Marine Corps service record, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

<sup>43</sup> Edward Marks to Capt Taylor Branson, 12 January 1928, Hymn Subject File, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD.

<sup>44</sup> “Marks Gets Marine Hymn.”

<sup>45</sup> “Fact Sheet Q & A,” unpublished paper, 1976, Hymn subject file, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD, hereafter “Fact Sheet Q & A.”

<sup>46</sup> Fred Doerr to Sam Fox, 28 April 1941, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

<sup>47</sup> Herman Fuchs to MajGen Cmdt (acting) A. A. Vandegrift, 4 June 1941, quoted in “Fact Sheet Q & A.”

<sup>48</sup> Vandegrift letter to Fuchs.

<sup>49</sup> Herman Fuchs to Arthur Garmaize, 7 July 1941, quoted in Herman Fuchs to Commandant A. A. Vandegrift, 7 July 1941, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

tion with Ostermann, Callahan expressed confusion regarding the proper channels for obtaining such permission, since he had heard that the Marks Corporation was claiming exclusive rights to the song and was aggressively defending those rights by collecting royalties from every copy sold by itself and other publishing houses, which Callahan estimated to be more than \$20,000 per year.<sup>50</sup> In a subsequent letter dated 11 February, he informed Ostermann that the Marks Corporation had recently sent a letter to every radio station in the country “putting them on notice that they, E.B. Marks, are the sole and exclusive copyright owners of the ‘Marines’ Hymn.’”<sup>51</sup> This information was corroborated on 12 February, when a sheet music publisher-turned-congressman, Sol Bloom (D-NY), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, forwarded a letter to Lieutenant General Commandant Thomas Holcomb that he had received from Herbert E. Marks of the Marks Corporation.

We are the publishers of ‘The Marines’ Hymn,’ official anthem of the Marine Corps. We bought the rights outright sometime ago [1935] from Sergeant L. Z. Phillips, Marine veteran, in whom the copyright was vested. Because the song is enjoying somewhat of a revival of popularity and because we feel inclined to do something to show our appreciation of the stand the Marines are making in the Far East, we wish voluntarily to restore a royalty on every copy sold. As Sergeant Phillips died some years ago, we should like this to be divided equally between his widow and any agency or organization which takes care of the Marine Corps’ families or its entertainment or its veterans. We have inquired and all we have been able to learn so far is that the Navy Relief Society of 90 Church

Street in this city is the proper organization.<sup>52</sup>

In the midst of the wartime mobilization of early 1942, Brigadier General Ostermann found time to formulate a response to this issue within a week that would settle the disagreement once and for all. On 18 February, he submitted a memorandum to Commandant Holcomb detailing the history of the ownership dispute and noting that it had been Marine Corps policy since 1931 “to give permission to music publishing houses to publish the Marines’ Hymn, provided the official version of the hymn is followed and that a credit line is used showing that the publication is by permission of the Marine Corps, the copyright owner.” He also stated that about 20 publishing houses had been given such permission to date.<sup>53</sup> Most importantly, Ostermann made the official recommendation “that the Director of Public Relations inform all broadcasting stations and music publishing companies that they are authorized to use the official Marine Corps version of the Hymn without cost.”<sup>54</sup> Five days later, on 23 February, Holcomb responded to Congressman Bloom’s letter and made it clear that Ostermann’s recommendation had become official policy. He also noted that the Marks Corporation’s offer to restore the royalties it had collected from previous copies sold was very generous, but that the Marine Corps had no separate organization similar to the Navy Relief Society. Regarding the statement that the Marks Corporation had bought the rights to the hymn from Phillips, Holcomb stated again that the impression that the hymn’s copyright was vested in Phillips was “erroneous” and that it had been in the name of the U.S. Marine Corps since 1919.<sup>55</sup> The Marks Corporation appears to have accepted Holcomb’s position, as there is no further correspondence to or from the Marks Corporation in the files, and there is no evidence that the company

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Ostermann memo to Holcomb.

<sup>51</sup> Leonard Callahan to BGen Ostermann, 11 February 1942, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

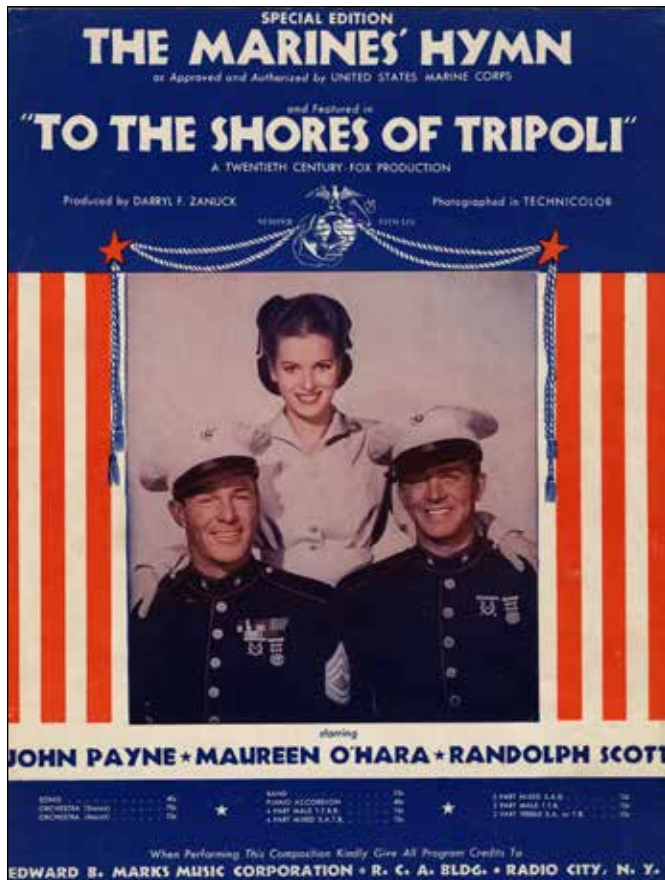
<sup>52</sup> Quoted in LtGen Cmdt Thomas Holcomb to Hon Sol Bloom, 23 February 1942, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library, hereafter Holcomb letter to Bloom.

<sup>53</sup> Ostermann memo to Holcomb.

<sup>54</sup> Ostermann memo to Holcomb.

<sup>55</sup> Holcomb letter to Bloom.





Marine Band Library

Cover of the “Marines’ Hymn” sheet music printed by the Edward B. Marks Music Corporation in 1942 as a tie-in to the 20th Century Fox film *To the Shores of Tripoli*.

reasserted its claim to the copyright when it was up for renewal in 1947.

During the next several months, Ostermann corresponded with several music publishing companies to clarify the new Marine Corps policy and reassure those who had previously received cease and desist letters from the Marks Corporation that they were within their rights to publish the song royalty-free.<sup>56</sup> He also reprimanded publishers who were not in compliance with the new policy and acknowledged the complaints of publishers who were frustrated by the sudden proliferation of sheet music editions of the

hymn, especially those that undercut the competition by selling for 3 or 4 cents per copy, far below the usual 22 cents per copy.<sup>57</sup>

The Marine Corps’ new policy of February 1942 ended the struggle over control of the “Marines’ Hymn” by reasserting Marine Corps ownership of the 1919 copyright away from L. Z. Phillips and the Marks Corporation and setting out a clear free use policy. The policy ensured that no third party could control publication rights of the hymn or collect royalties from other publishers by claiming to be the copyright holder. This move was not only in the best interest of the Marine Corps, but it was in step with the mood of a country at war that craved patriotic music. This is illustrated in a *New York Times* article from December 1942, in which Dr. Joseph Maddy, music professor at the University of Michigan and chairman of the Michigan wartime civic music committee, asserted that “military songs of the armed services were public property in wartime” and promised to “appeal to Washington against private copyright owners.”<sup>58</sup> Maddy argued that “there is no more reason why the services should sponsor a privately owned song than a particular brand of soap, cigarette or breakfast food.” While criticizing the private copyright owners of the Army Air Forces song, the “Caisson Song” of the field artillery, and “Semper Paratus” of the Coast Guard for demanding royalties, he notably praised the Marine Corps for making its hymn “readily available” to publishers.<sup>59</sup> However, he was likely unaware that it had taken more than a decade of behind-the-scenes frustration for the Marine Corps to officially enact this policy.

### “In the Air, on Land and Sea,” November 1942

The “Marines’ Hymn” experienced an upswing in popularity in the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor and the defense of Wake Island in December 1941. Sever-

<sup>56</sup> BGen Edward Ostermann to Manhattan Publications, 30 April 1942, Hymn subject file, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD; BGen Edward Ostermann to Morris Music Company, 31 July 1942; and Morris Music Company to BGen Edward Ostermann, 3 August 1942, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

<sup>57</sup> Eugene Warner to BGen Edward Ostermann, 28 July 1942, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

<sup>58</sup> “Fights Private Fees on Military Songs: Michigan Music Teacher Says Public Owns Service Tunes,” *New York Times*, 18 December 1942, 16.

<sup>59</sup> “Fights Private Fees on Military Songs,” 16.

al phonograph recordings of the song were advertised, including ones by Kate Smith (Columbia Records), Gene Krupa (Okeh Records), Richard Himber (RCA Victor), the Victor Military Band (RCA Victor), and Tony Pastor (Bluebird Records), and *Billboard* magazine reported that music machine operators nationwide were being encouraged to work with local movie theaters to promote recordings of the hymn alongside the new 20th Century Fox film *To the Shores of Tripoli*, which premiered in San Diego on 24 March 1942.<sup>60</sup> A special sheet music edition of the “Marines’ Hymn” was also produced by the Marks Corporation as a tie-in to the film.

At this time, many ordinary Americans also chose to pen their own verses of the hymn to express their support for Marines fighting around the world. Several people sent their verses to Marine Corps Headquarters, and collections of these letters are kept at the Marine Corps History Division and the Marine Corps Band Library. The few responses to these letters included in the collections thank the sender for their contribution and reaffirm the policy of only supporting the official version of the hymn. However, despite the official policy, one unauthorized verse was explicitly approved and promoted. On 17 May 1942, the radio station WJSB in Quantico, Virginia, aired a version of the “Marines’ Hymn” sung by Kate Smith, a highly popular singer whose radio broadcasts went on to sell more than \$600 million worth of war bonds throughout the war.<sup>61</sup> The version of the “Marines’ Hymn” she sang in May 1942 included the following verse:

When today we hear a call to war,  
We have wings to take us there.  
With an Ace High Aviation Corps  
The Marines are in the air!  
And whatever seas our ships may ply,  
To whatever distant scenes,

They will find the sky commanded  
By the United States Marines.<sup>62</sup>

The following day, Brigadier General Robert L. Denig, director of the newly established Division of Public Relations, wrote to the producers of *Halls of Montezuma*, a weekly radio program started the previous month by enlisted Marines broadcasting from the Marine Corps base auditorium in San Diego, California. Denig informed them of the debut performance of this verse honoring Marine Corps Aviation and suggested that they use it on their radio program.<sup>63</sup> He gave credit to Oscar Hammerstein III for writing the verse, although he clearly meant Oscar Hammerstein II, the famous lyricist and librettist, rather than his future grandson of the same name. Although most famous now for his later partnership with Richard Rodgers on musicals such as *Oklahoma!* (1943) and *The Sound of Music* (1959), in early 1942 Hammerstein was at a low point in his career. In 1936, Hammerstein had been a founding member of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, and as he watched world events unfold in January 1942, his patriotism was once again stirred, as seen in a letter to his friend, Broadway producer Max Gordon.

I am trying to write a good song that might do something for the nation’s war morale. I am convinced that all the war songs I have heard so far are on the wrong track. But I know that there is a great situation for a great song and I am going to hunt it out—if it takes me a year.<sup>64</sup>

Within three months of writing this letter, Hammerstein’s verse honoring Marine Corps Aviation was played over the airways.

Many amateur lyricists were also inspired by the accomplishments of the Marine Corps aviators.

<sup>60</sup> “Picture Tie-ups for Music Machine Operators,” *Billboard* 54, no. 22 (28 March 1942): 116.

<sup>61</sup> Frank G. Prial, “Kate Smith, All-American Singer, Dies at 79,” *New York Times*, 18 June 1986, 1.

<sup>62</sup> “Fact Sheet Q & A”; and 1stLt W. N. Gibson to Charles E. Goodman, 22 May 1942, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

<sup>63</sup> BGen Robert Denig to Capt Harry Maynard, 18 May 1942, Command Performance, Correspondence and Radio Program Schedules, March–December 1942, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD.

<sup>64</sup> Hugh Fordin, *Getting to Know Him: A Biography of Oscar Hammerstein II* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 1995), 141, 175–76.



*Historical Resources Branch, Marine Corps History Division*  
World War II-era recruitment poster celebrating Marine Corps Aviation.



*Historical Resources Branch, Marine Corps History Division*  
BGen Robert L. Denig, director of the Division of Public Relations.

One submission sent to Marine Corps Headquarters opened with the line “They fought in the air at Midway Isle as well as land and sea,” and another began the second verse with “History is in the making now there’s a big job to be done; but we’ll ‘Keep ‘em Flying’ high and wide until victory is won.”<sup>65</sup> In July 1942, Charles A. Darr of Mildred, Kansas, went a step further by proposing a formal change to the hymn.

It seems to me that the song should have a place in it for that splendid part of your organization, the Marine Air Corps. I would suggest a slight change and addition as follows: “We fight our country’s battles in the air, on the land and sea.” . . . Our Flying Marines have made such a splendid record, that we owe them every tribute for what they have done. We might say “The Marines are flying and have the situation well under wing.”<sup>66</sup>

One week later, Brigadier General Denig personally responded to Darr’s suggestion, stating, “If an opportunity presents itself to use these lines we shall furnish you with a copy of the publication.”<sup>67</sup> He sent another response one week later, stating, “Your suggestion that the Marines’ Hymn should contain a toast to Marine Corps Aviation is certainly very appropriate. You will, no doubt, be interested to know that a new aviation verse was recently introduced by Kate Smith, and approved for release by the Public Relations Division, HQ, USMC.” He also expressed interest in the suggestion of the motto “Marines are flying and have the situation well under wing.”<sup>68</sup> Denig’s continued promotion of the recent aviation verse sung by Kate Smith and his unusually personal response to Darr’s ideas indicate his growing support for a change in the

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Plummer to BGen Robert Denig, 25 February 1942; and Rosalind Wade to W. F. Santelmann, 29 June 1942, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

<sup>66</sup> Charles Darr to LtGen Cmdt Thomas Holcomb, 7 July 1942, Hymn subject file, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD.

<sup>67</sup> BGen Robert Denig to Charles Darr, 14 July 1942, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

<sup>68</sup> BGen Robert Denig to Charles Darr, 20 July 1942, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

hymn's lyrics to officially honor the contributions of Marine Corps Aviation.

On 7 November 1942, the annual meeting of the 1st Marine Aviation Force Veterans Association, founded by aviation veterans of World War I and a precursor of the Marine Corps Aviation Association, was held in Cincinnati, Ohio. At the meeting, Henry Lloyd Tallman of Albany, Georgia, who had served in Oye, France, as a gunnery sergeant in the 1st Marine Aviation Force, Squadron B, in 1918, "protest[ed] that the air arm was ignored in the 'Marine Hymn' [and] persuaded the group to adopt a resolution directed to the commandant urging correction of this unintentional slight."<sup>69</sup> James E. Nicholson, adjutant of the association, conveyed the group's resolution in a letter to Commandant Holcomb, asserting that "nothing, in our opinion, could do more to recognize and pay tribute to the air arm of our corps, past, present, and future."<sup>70</sup> Holcomb responded favorably to the suggestion, and issued Letter of Instruction 267, stating that on 21 November 1942 he officially approved a change in the fourth line of the first verse of the hymn from "on the land as on the sea" to "in the air, on land and sea."<sup>71</sup>

Holcomb sent a personal response to Nicholson to inform him of this change, noting that he was reluctant "to make a change in the historic song but that he was doing so to accord well-merited recognition to the fact that our fields of operation now include the air."<sup>72</sup> A memo from Colonel S. C. Cumming, acting adjutant and inspector to Brigadier General Denig, indicated that an application was being made for a new copyright of the song, and instructed Denig to have the Division of Public Relations print an up-

<sup>69</sup> Henry L. Tallman, U.S. Marine Corps Muster Rolls, 1893–1958, Rolls 145–156 (Historical Resources Branch, MCHD); and "Alteration Made in Marine Anthem: First Verse Revamped to Give Recognition to Troops in Air Branch," *Baltimore (MD) Sun*, 27 November 1942, 4, 28, hereafter, "Alteration Made in Marine Anthem."

<sup>70</sup> "Alteration Made in Marine Anthem," 28.

<sup>71</sup> LtGen Cmdt Thomas Holcomb, Letter of Instruction 267, 25 November 1942, Hymn subject file, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD.

<sup>72</sup> "Alteration Made in Marine Anthem," 4; and James E. Nicholson to LtGen Cmdt Thomas Holcomb, 24 November 1942, Marines' Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.



Historical Resources Branch, Marine Corps History Division  
Insignia of the 1st Marine Aviation Force, whose veterans association was credited for proposing the lyric change honoring Marine Corps Aviation in the "Marines' Hymn."



Historical Resources Branch, Marine Corps History Division  
LtGen Cmdt Thomas Holcomb (pictured here as a major general), who authorized the lyric change in the "Marines' Hymn" to honor Marine Corps Aviation on 21 November 1942.

dated edition.<sup>73</sup> It is unclear whether a new copyright was actually registered at this time, but an updated edition was printed and promoted. Denig issued a press release about the lyric change through the Associated Press on 26 November, providing the text of the updated first verse and stating that although many people had suggested similar changes, Commandant Holcomb specifically adopted the version proposed by the 1st Marine Aviation Force Veterans Association.<sup>74</sup>

Darr, who made the suggestion to add the line “in the air, on the land and sea” in July 1942, sent a follow-up letter in November 1942 to Holcomb to express his pleasure that the change had been officially approved and to take personal credit for it. He also acknowledged his frustration at being repeatedly denied the chance to enlist in the current war based on his age of 62, but was satisfied with calling himself an “Honorary member of the Marines” due to his contribution to the hymn.<sup>75</sup>

## A Hundred Years and Counting, 1947

Throughout the war, the impact of the hymn on the American psyche remained strong; more people were inspired to write their own verses and numerous news outlets reported stories that highlighted the hymn’s international notoriety, by both friend and foe, as an important symbol of the American military. A thorough discussion of the role of the hymn during World War II is beyond the scope of this article but deserves to be addressed separately.

The year 1947 marked two significant moments in the history of the “Marines’ Hymn.” First, on 31 December, the original copyright for the hymn that was registered on 19 August 1919 by Phillips and the Marine Corps expired, and the song returned to the public domain. Marine Corps historian Joel D. Thacker called attention to this change in early January 1948, stating in a letter, “Future correspondence must omit

any reference to the Marine Corps as copyright owner. In any case where permission is requested to use the Hymn, correspondence granting such permission should suggest that the version considered as official by the Marine Corps should be used.”<sup>76</sup>

According to a later assistant register of copyrights, the Marine Corps did not renew the initial copyright in 1947 because it was not legally eligible to do so. Specifically, if Phillips had created the work as a private citizen, only he or his successors could have renewed it; but if Phillips had created the work as part of his official duties, “it would have been a publication of the U.S. Government within the meaning of the copyright law, and the USMC could have claimed neither the original copyright nor the renewal copyright.”<sup>77</sup> This point was further emphasized in a letter from Master Gunnery Sergeant D. Michael Ressler, chief librarian of the Marine Corps Band Library in 1991: “Copyright law prohibits the United States government from holding any copyright. . . . Early publications of the Marines’ Hymn which gave copyright ownership to the Marine Corps were incorrectly credited.”<sup>78</sup> These later statements may provide some legal clarification, to the point of rendering the copyright dispute of the 1930s irrelevant, but they do not negate the fact that the copyright was officially issued in 1919 and that the years of confusion and debate over ownership of the hymn led to a change to Marine Corps policy regarding its use in February 1942.

The second significant moment in 1947 was related to the struggles faced by the Marine Corps as a whole immediately following the war. In 1945 and 1946, Marine Corps leadership had to fight for the very existence of the Corps against efforts by members of the War Department and Congress to significantly reduce its strength, until the National Defense Act of 1947 secured its independent status.<sup>79</sup> Postwar

<sup>73</sup> Col S. C. Cumming memo to BGen Robert Denig, 25 November 1942, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

<sup>74</sup> “Alteration Made in Marine Anthem,” 28.

<sup>75</sup> Charles A. Darr to LtGen Cmdt Thomas Holcomb, 28 November 1942, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

<sup>76</sup> Joel Thacker to Whom It May Concern, 10 January 1948, Hymn subject file, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD.

<sup>77</sup> Waldo H. Moore to Office of Naval Research, 4 August 1977, Hymn subject file, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD. Section 23 of the Copyright Act of 1909 addresses the issue of copyright renewal.

<sup>78</sup> Mike Ressler to Sgt Kathleen Roost, 1 November 1991, Marines’ Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

<sup>79</sup> Robert D. Heintz Jr., *Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps, 1775–1962* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1962), 514–18.

recruitment was also a serious challenge, especially for the Marine Corps Reserve, as detailed in an article by Captain Dennis D. Nicholson in the *Marine Corps Gazette* in December 1947.<sup>80</sup> Nicholson asserted that although recruitment numbers had been high in the first nine months of 1946, the elimination of key incentives and changes to the G.I. Bill of Rights benefits in July 1947 had caused a steep decline.<sup>81</sup> This downward trend was compounded by the fact that a disproportionately high number of enlistments would expire in 1948, meaning that the Recruiting Service needed to procure nearly 80,000 more reservists by 30 January 1948 “to bring our Reserve strength up to the authorized 100,000.”<sup>82</sup>

Faced with this monumental task, the Marine Corps once again turned to its popular hymn to gain public support, and in early December newspapers around the country announced that Marine Corps Headquarters had designated 7–13 December as “‘Marines’ Hymn’ Centennial Week.” The idea shrewdly capitalized on the popular yet unsubstantiated belief that the hymn had first been written in 1847 by an anonymous Marine serving in the Mexican-American War.<sup>83</sup> The centennial week, significantly starting on the anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack, would begin a year in which the hymn would be dedicated “to the new postwar citizen Marine Reserve” and was specifically created to bring attention to the nationwide recruiting drive to build the Marine Corps Reserve to full strength.<sup>84</sup> It was an effort to appeal to potential recruits on a more emotional level than could be done by a list of financial and educational benefits.

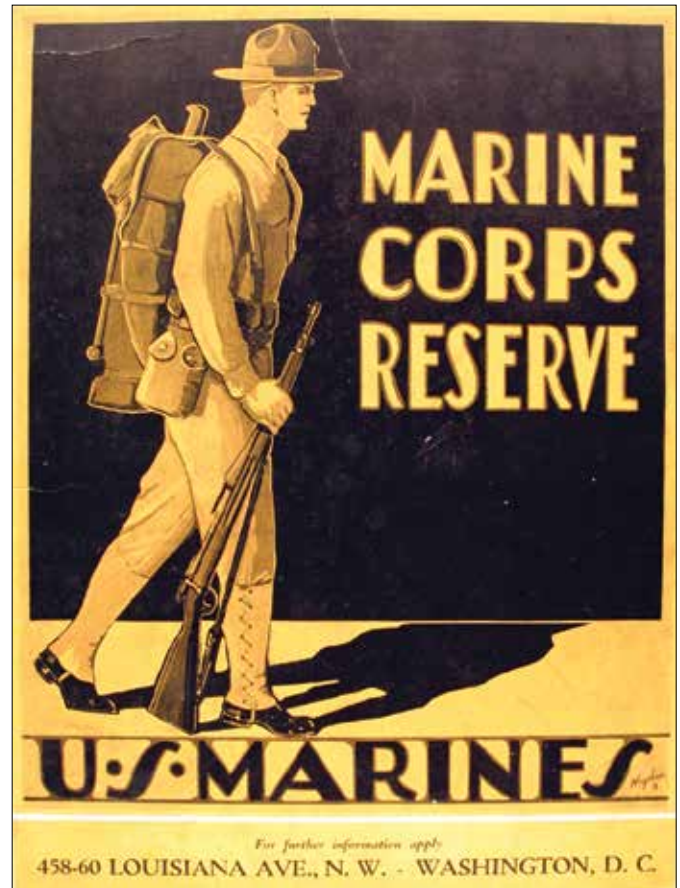
<sup>80</sup> Capt Dennis D. Nicholson Jr., “Recruiting—First Service of the Corps,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 31, no. 12 (December 1947): 33–41. See also Sgt Edward J. Evans, “Reserve Power,” *Leatherneck*, October 1947, 3–5.

<sup>81</sup> Originally established to provide services and benefits to the veterans of World War II, the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, a.k.a. the G.I. Bill of Rights, was signed by Franklin D. Roosevelt on 22 June 1944. S. 1776, 78th Cong., 2d Sess. (7 February 1944).

<sup>82</sup> Nicholson, “Recruiting—First Service of the Corps,” 34.

<sup>83</sup> For more information about the nineteenth-century origins of the hymn, see Bowers, “A Song with ‘Dash’ and ‘Pep,’” 6–8.

<sup>84</sup> “Marine Corps Hymn Centennial Week to Be Observed,” *Visalia (CA) Times-Delta*, 6 December 1947, 2; “Marine Corps Marks 100th Year of Hymn,” *Cumberland (MD) Sunday Times*, 7 December 1947, 53; “Song for Men: Marine Corps Hymn Chanted 100 Years Old,” *Decatur (AL) Daily*, 7 December 1947, 3; and “Marine Hymn Marks 100th Anniversary,” *King-sport (TN) News*, 8 December 1947, 4.



Historical Resources Branch, Marine Corps History Division  
Recruitment poster for the Marine Corps Reserve, which was created by an act of Congress on 29 August 1916.

One article announcing the centennial week noted that “ex-Marines and physically fit young men have an opportunity to share the comradeship of an unusual group. Reservists can join in the words of the hymn and say with thousands of other young men, ‘. . . we are proud to claim the title of United States Marine.’”<sup>85</sup>

The hymn’s centennial week was meant to be a widespread celebration, with newspapers announcing that “an invitation has been extended to members of the entertainment field and all others who wish to participate in ceremonies for the centennial of the song” that “sparkles with lilt and lift.”<sup>86</sup> In answer to this call, the logbook for the Marine Corps Band recorded two performances that week specifically relat-

<sup>85</sup> “Marine Hymn Marks 100th Anniversary,” 4.

<sup>86</sup> “Marine Corps Hymn Centennial Week to Be Observed,” 2.

ing to the celebration. On Wednesday, 10 December, their performance of the hymn featuring nine male singers from Catholic University in Washington, DC, was heard over the Mutual Broadcasting System, and on 12 December it was sung during the band's popular weekly radio program *Dream Hour for Shut-ins* on NBC.<sup>87</sup> More notably, the "Marines' Hymn Centennial Week" was the subject of the 8 December broadcast of *Believe It or Not* featuring Robert Ripley on NBC. The 15-minute episode told a fanciful account of the origin of the hymn, in which the impoverished composer Jacques Offenbach impulsively scribbled the musical notation for a military march on the shirt of a beggar in lieu of money. Months later, the story went, Offenbach wanted to use the tune in his new opera, but the clever beggar charged him 7,000 francs for the publication rights. The beggar became a wealthy man, Offenbach's opera was a success, and that marching song eventually became the "Marines' Hymn."<sup>88</sup> Given the recent behind-the-scenes copyright dispute over the song, it is fascinating that this spurious account revolved around a fight for ownership between the original composer and a beggar.

## Conclusion

The story of the "Marines' Hymn" from 1920 to 1947 is primarily one of Marine Corps leadership taking full ownership of their song and using its popularity to promote a positive public image of the Corps. In some cases, these actions were done behind the scenes, such as the memos generated by Major Fegan in the late 1920s recommending the removal of lyrics that were "uncomplimentary to countries in which we have served" to create a dignified, timeless version of the hymn.<sup>89</sup> Others actions, such as the protracted

copyright dispute of the 1930s, were primarily about control of the use of the hymn but had the unexpected benefit of broadening its reach, by resulting in a policy that allowed anyone free use of the authorized, properly credited version. Other decisions were much more public, such as the celebration of the hymn's centennial week in conjunction with a massive recruiting drive, and the most well-known episode from this time: the lyric change to "in the air, on land and sea" on 21 November 1942. This was the last official change to the "Marines' Hymn" to date and, similar to the addition of "first to fight for right and freedom" during World War I, it was done to reflect one of the strongest aspects of the Marine Corps' public image. Marine Corps Aviation was not a new concept in 1942, but it loomed large in the minds of Americans as events in the Pacific theater unfolded, and it is unsurprising that so many people independently suggested lyrics for the hymn that would honor the accomplishments and sacrifices of the aviators involved. The Division of Public Relations approved this idea by promoting the verse written by Oscar Hammerstein II and sung by Kate Smith. When the official change was approved, the division gave credit to the 1st Marine Aviation Force Veterans Association for the new lyric but made it clear that the change was meant to be inclusive "to give deserved recognition to the air arm of the corps as a whole not because of any special action performed by any certain unit or units."<sup>90</sup>

By the end of this period, the hymn could no longer be trivialized or dismissed as "boastful" or "devil-may-care." It had served as inspiration and comfort through the largest war in history, to both Marines and civilians alike, and its popularity showed no signs of waning.

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<sup>87</sup> Marine Corps Band log book, 10 and 12 December 1947, U.S. Marine Band Library.

<sup>88</sup> Transcript of *Believe It or Not* featuring Robert Ripley, episode 151, sketch: "Marine Hymn," 8 December 1947, Marines' Hymn file, U.S. Marine Band Library.

<sup>89</sup> Fegan memo to Lejeune.

<sup>90</sup> Freling Foster, telegram to U.S. Marine Corps Division of Public Relations, 10 January 1943; Maj George Van Der Hoef to Freling Foster, 11 January 1942 [sic -1943], Marine Corps Hymn Correspondence, January 1943–August 1946, Historical Resources Branch, MCHD.

# Strategic Communication through Narration

## HOW U.S. MARINE CORPS COMMANDANTS STILL USE STORY TO INSPIRE SUPPORT

by Meriwether Ball and William J. Brown, PhD

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**Abstract:** During the past four decades Walter R. Fisher's narrative theory has been developed and applied to many different areas of communication study. Yet, to date, extraordinarily little research has applied Fisher's theory to the study of military communication, despite Fisher's own formative experiences as a Marine, combat veteran in Korea, and drill instructor. This study illustrates how Fisher's theoretical framework provides a useful model for studying how Marine Corps Commandants strategically use storytelling to communicate important messages to those within their community. By examining three artifacts as communicative narratives, we explore how Commandants have used Fisher's tools to persuade their fighting forces to grasp their perspective about the situated circumstances, posture, and future direction of their command. Implications of storytelling as a powerful communication tool in the military and recommendations for future research are discussed. **Keywords:** narrative paradigm, oral history, military strategic communication, Walter Fisher, U.S. Marine Corps history, Commandant of the Marine Corps, David H. Berger, Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr., Clifton B. Cates

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The sitting Commandant of the Marine Corps gave an interview to a Marine veteran member of Congress recently, which was posted as

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<https://doi.org/10.35318/mch.2021070204>

a video podcast to YouTube.<sup>1</sup> General David H. Berger shared much in the way of new information during the interview. He revealed stories not previously publicized about his family, his education, and his start as a U.S. Marine. He revealed struggles and inspirations that anyone—civilian and Marine alike—could find relatable. His life's trajectory, from the most ordinary nonmilitary, middle-class upbringing to leading a highly regarded fighting organization, is delivered matter-of-factly. While his intentions and descriptions were unquestionably sincere, this was perhaps no accident; it was likely quite strategic. General Berger was doing what Commandants have done through the

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<sup>1</sup> Rep Michael Gallagher, "New Look at the Marine Corps with General David H. Berger," 18 February 2021, YouTube, 58:05 min.



ages: he was using story to attract attention to and to motivate support for the Marine Corps.

The purpose of this article is to show how communication scholar and Marine veteran Walter Fisher's narrative theory can be applied to understand how military leaders strategically communicate through storytelling.<sup>2</sup> Through sharing their experiences in story form, Commandants can connect with their audiences by breaking down barriers between warfighters of all ranks and seasons, allowing the audience to make sense of the problem and to participate in the solutions. First, the authors explain *narrative paradigm theory*, or storytelling theory, through the scholars who developed and evolved it. Second, we analyze the artifacts of oral history interview transcripts of Commandant Generals Clifton B. Cates and Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr., and the video interview of General Berger. These artifacts were selected from the collections of documented publicly published interviews of these three wartime leaders to provide examples of narration that clarify and unify the intended message of supporting Marines and the Corps. The stories Commandants told during armchair interviews decades ago have real meaning well into the twenty-first century. Third, we examine literature regarding the ways in which storytelling compels warfighters to learn to decipher important messages in narration.

This article also explores how Marine veteran Walter Fisher changed modern communication scholarship. Terms that are critical to this article are discussed for their purpose in this specific thesis. First, *strategic communication* is defined and the intended audience considered. Second, the value of oral histories as strategic communication artifacts is addressed.

## Strategic Communication

There are two perspectives through which we can describe these Commandant interviews as *strategic communication*. The first considers defining the term as it is used within this community, a rather technical and professionally accepted definition. The second proposes that because the outcome of their narratives promotes the Marine Corps' culture, biography, history, and character—primary qualifiers of adherence to theory—they also qualify as strategic communication.

Regarding the first viewpoint, while Fisher certainly would understand and value all aspects of the common term *strategic communication*, we believe he would have considered it not only in relation to communication scholarship but also to military usage. This term is used in professional practices including public relations, brand development, and corporate communication. Yet, when those in the Marine Corps community read the term *strategic communication*, frequently the Corps' 2017 development of the communication strategy and operations occupational field springs to mind. In that directive, the military occupational specialties of public affairs and combat camera were combined and renamed.<sup>3</sup> The Corps defines *communication strategy* (COMMSTRAT) as “a communication activity that provides timely, accurate information which informs and educates about the missions, organizations, capabilities, needs, activities and performance of the Marine Corps as an instrument of national defense.”<sup>4</sup> While this definition was not known to Fisher at the time he developed his theory, the elements of it apply to his theory of narrative.

The second point asserts that if strategic communication was not tactically planned, it wound up so in the natural order of Commandants discussing their experiences. By sharing one genuinely spoken story after another, each Commandant revealed aspects of their service that directly or indirectly inspires posi-

<sup>2</sup> Walter R. Fisher, “Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument,” *Communications Monographs* 51, no. 1 (1984): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758409390180>; Walter R. Fisher, “The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration,” *Communications Monographs* 52, no. 4 (1985): 347–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758509376117>; and Walter R. Fisher, “Clarifying the Narrative Paradigm,” *Communications Monographs*, 56, no. 1 (1989): 55–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758909390249>.

<sup>3</sup> Marine Administrative Message (MARADMINS) 534/17, *Guidance for the Establishment of the Communication Strategy and Operations (45xx) Occupational Field through the Merge Of 43xx (Public Affairs) and 46xx (Combat Camera)* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 28 September 2017).

<sup>4</sup> “U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific—COMMSTRAT,” Public Affairs, U.S. Marine Corps, accessed July 2021.

tive sentiments about the Corps. The purpose of strategic communication is to accomplish just such an objective, as revealed in Fisher's theory.

### **Audience**

Of the three artifacts examined here, only Berger's was created during the internet age. This matters because social media has become an important vehicle for strategic communication. For instance, the use of strategic narrative, or strategic storytelling, has emerged as a form of soft power, which is a persuasive method for international relations.<sup>5</sup> Both Berger, with his 73,000 followers, and Representative Michael Gallagher (R-WI), with his 34,000 followers, shared the interview on their official Twitter pages.<sup>6</sup> Gallagher shared it on his YouTube channel as well as his Spotify station. This combined distribution indicates strategic communication intent by Berger. Considering that choice, there is cause to believe that if Generals Cates and Shepherd were alive during the internet age and engaged in social media, they, too, would have shared their oral history interviews with their followers. Indeed, the Marine Corps Oral History Program, which conducted and published these interviews, explicitly states that is the purpose of the artifacts: "Collectively, these memoirs provide a reservoir of material to be used profitably by both military and civilian researchers."<sup>7</sup>

### **Oral Histories as Artifacts**

An astute observer may agree that the current Commandant's participation in an interview qualifies as strategic communication, as it was conducted on a public social media platform. That same observer may argue that the post-World War II-era Commandants'

participation in Marine Corps-arranged oral history interviews would not be strategic communication because they were: 1) conducted after their retirement, and 2) not expected to be viewed by the general public.

Regarding the first point, the time spans for each analyzed narrative are significant in both cases. For instance, Berger discussed his childhood and early marriage in his interview; both narratives occurred at least four decades prior to his discussion of each. Generals Cates and Shepherd shared narratives of events that had occurred two to five decades earlier. Roughly the same amount of time had passed since the events and their remembrance in interviews for each individual. It is unlikely that the quality of the earlier-serving Commandants' recollections was of a lower accuracy than that of the current Commandant. Further, in both cases, the current and earlier Commandants were talking to friendly interviewers. Cates and Shepherd were interviewed by Frank Benis, who conducted many such interviews for the Marine Corps, while Berger was interviewed by a Marine veteran who had served under him many years earlier. This trusted relationship between interviewee and interviewer, both supporters of making a record of a Commandant's perspectives on topics of interest to the Marine Corps community, validates the Corps' definition of strategic communication.

### **Fisher's Theoretical Framework**

The groundbreaking theory developed by Walter Fisher on the efficacy of human narration for persuasion likely had its early seeds in his military experience.<sup>8</sup> Fisher was a Marine veteran who saw combat at the Chosin Reservoir and subsequently served as a drill instructor. Later, upon finishing his bachelor's degree, he served as an Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps officer at Point Loma High School in San Diego, California.<sup>9</sup> Extraordinarily little attention, thus far, has been given to understanding Fisher's military service as an important part of his scholarly journey.

<sup>5</sup>Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O'Loughlin, "Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power," *Media, War, and Conflict* 7 no. 1 (March 2014): 70–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635213516696>.

<sup>6</sup>Cmdt Gen David H. Berger (@CMC\_MarineCorps), "A great conversation with Marine veteran and Congressman, @RepGallagher," Twitter, 18 February 2021, 1150; and Rep Michael Gallagher (@RepGallagher), "It was an honor to have @CMC\_MarineCorps on the NEW Look to discuss his transformational plan to ensure the Marine Corps can deter, fight, and win in the Indo-Pacific," Twitter, 18 February 2021.

<sup>7</sup>"Foreword," in Samantha Williams, comp., *United States Marine Corps Oral History Collection Catalogue Career Interviews* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2019), i.

<sup>8</sup>Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm," 1.

<sup>9</sup>"In Memoriam: Walter R. Fisher, 87," *News*, University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, 31 July 2018.

This is somewhat surprising, as the military experience of great storytellers like C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien have been considered essential to fully understanding their narrative techniques.<sup>10</sup>

Fisher's narrative paradigm theory, which also can be regarded as a narrative persuasion theory, was groundbreaking for challenging the notion that understanding and agreement come only from the paradigm, or concept, of rational argument and reason.<sup>11</sup> He was convinced that decision-making occurred via another paradigm: reasoning based in story from history, culture, and character. Fisher's five assumptions that form the foundation of his narrative paradigm theory include: 1) people are natural storytellers; 2) people decide based on good reasons; 3) good reasons are based on history, biography, culture, and character; 4) narrative coherence—whether the story is rational—is based on coherence (whether the story holds together); and 5) narrative fidelity (whether the story rings true), as people constantly reevaluate their lives based on the world of stories available for their choosing.<sup>12</sup> The storytelling context is of primary importance in understanding how narration works in the military environment.

## Narrative Coherence

Fisher's theory includes important conditions that must be tested, holding that every story must meet dual criteria: narrative coherence and narrative fidelity.<sup>13</sup> Do the people and events line up? Do they fit together? Fisher described the judgments people place on a story to determine if they pass these tests. *Coherence* considers how people look for contradictions, wherein logic is of great use. *Fidelity* considers how people judge the details, facts, and interpretations of a story in comparison to other similar stories that they have heard.

<sup>10</sup> Nora Alfaiz, "The Chronicles of War Repercussions in J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis's Life and Work" (PhD diss., George Washington University, 2020), 3; and Danielle Marie Oxnam, "A Storied Friendship: A Look into the Lives of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien" (honors thesis, University of Arizona, 2015), 18, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm," 3.

<sup>12</sup> Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm," 6; and Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm," 349.

<sup>13</sup> Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm," 8.

## Narrative Fidelity and the Logic of Good Reasons

The primary criterion for narrative fidelity is whether the story might line up with a story a person would tell about themselves. Audiences are concerned about the message's values, the relevance of those values to the decisions involved, the outcomes of maintaining those values, the overlap of the audience and the worldview, and, finally, what the listener believes is "an ideal basis for human conduct."<sup>14</sup> The Commandants' stories told here align with the theory in this way, as they are narratives that mirror Marines' circumstances throughout the Corps' wartime history. If the battle, location, and names were changed to another time and place, these anecdotes would maintain the same fidelity. These allow observers a persuasive case for the value of serving in the Marine Corps.

## Storytelling through Interview

Considering that Fisher devoted more than 30 years to developing and discussing storytelling theory, he undoubtedly observed the storytelling techniques of the Marine Corps leaders under whom he served just prior to his academic career. Military storytellers, like all storytellers, "make their life experiences understandable by explaining choices and actions in relation to goals and outcomes, thereby expressing their identities within a personally meaningful plot."<sup>15</sup> In this way, narrative can be a vehicle for making sense of seemingly random and disconnected events, transforming them into common, interrelated, and meaningful periods of a culture's history. This interactive interview style—the dialogic interview—allows military leaders to tell their stories in a way that resonates at a personal level with the goal of making a distinct connection with the members of their audience. This personal connection also allows for hierarchical boundaries, including military rank, to be removed—ever valuable when Commandants are seeking to build unity with their

<sup>14</sup> Walter Fisher, "Toward a Logic of Good Reasons," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 64, no. 4 (1978): 380, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335637809383443>.

<sup>15</sup> *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*, ed. by Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009), s.v. "Stories and Storytelling," <https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781412959384.n364>.

audiences. Such interviews allow expanded narratives, which are good specimens to apply Fisher's theory.

## Literature Review

### *Fisher's Response to Critics*

Soon after Fisher's theory was published, Robert C. Rowland emerged as the primary challenger of its versatility, especially for nontraditional narrative works, which Fisher soon explored.<sup>16</sup> In his first response to criticism, Fisher explained that his presentation of narrative paradigm theory came to be because technical reasoning and argumentative skill on specific subjects makes the average discussions of the general public appear irrational.<sup>17</sup> This leaves little hope of spanning the bridge between experts and ordinary people regarding rationality, which left one class of humanity appearing to be superior to another.<sup>18</sup> In 1985, Fisher published an elaboration on his theory. First, he explained the expanse of his philosophy on narrative: every scholarly genre includes a place for myth and metaphor, a place for cognition and import; in other words, a place for story. Second, compelling narratives provide reasons for decision and action.<sup>19</sup> Finally, in his 1989-published "Clarifying the Narrative Paradigm," Fisher explains that narrative paradigm theory is more of a way to look at a topic, not the topic itself; it is not rhetoric, or criticism, or a celebration of narration, per se. Although it does celebrate storytellers, his theory does not deny any scholarly genres, does not deny rhetorical communication, is not a rejection of traditional argumentation, and does not deny the power of ideology or distortion or other communicative practices. Narrative paradigm theory is meant to offer a way of interpreting human communication that assumes that communications are essentially stories shaped by history, biography, culture, and character.<sup>20</sup> These important aspects allow room for broad application to the study of military storytelling and

discussion. Narrative paradigm theory offers an important theoretical lens to study Marine Corps strategic communication to any targeted audience. And finally, Virginia Commonwealth University scholars Randolph T. Barker and Kim Gower described the theory's value this way: "[Narrative paradigm theory] presents a model of storytelling as a complete organizational communication tool."<sup>21</sup>

### *Other Scholarly Interpretations*

University of San Francisco scholar Cynthia Mitchell explored the power of storytelling to transform organizations and found that well-led organizations of all types—military, business, or government—benefit from leaders for whom narrative is an essential tool. She observed that

Human connectivity in storytelling is essential to acknowledge because a member's personal story often influences others in the workplace. Organizations must ensure that their members are indeed recognized and acknowledged; the organization will be incomplete without telling the sub-stories of everyone involved.<sup>22</sup>

In routine and unexpected circumstances, leaders tap into their wells of narratives that support their organizations' culture and identity. That is why these unscripted interviews are so fascinating. When asked open-ended biographical or retrospective questions, the Marine Corps Commandants studied in this article spontaneously drew from their wells of experience (biography) and told stories that were familiar to other such stories (narrative coherence), which rang true (narrative fidelity), and which appealed to Corps history, biography, culture, and character.

Today's global leaders must win their audiences with authenticity by sharing stories that create mean-

<sup>16</sup> Robert C. Rowland, "On Limiting the Narrative Paradigm: Three Case Studies," *Communications Monographs* 56, no. 1 (1989): 39–54, <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/03637758909390248>.

<sup>17</sup> Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm," 4.

<sup>18</sup> Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm," 16.

<sup>19</sup> Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm," 2.

<sup>20</sup> Fisher, "Clarifying the Narrative Paradigm," 3.

<sup>21</sup> Randolph T. Barker and Kim Gower, "Strategic Application of Storytelling in Organizations: Toward Effective Communication in a Diverse World," *Journal of Business Communication* 47, no. 3 (July 2010): 295.

<sup>22</sup> Cynthia Mitchell, "Organizational Storytelling: How Leaders Use Powerful Stories to Transform Their Organizations" (PhD diss., University of San Francisco, 2019), 4.

ing between themselves and those listening in global industries and sectors. “Too often, leaders fall into the trap of thinking people will automatically listen to them and take appropriate, effective action in response to what they expect, just because of their authoritative position,” explain scholars Gabrielle Dolan and Yamini Naidu. “They soon learn that leading others is much more complicated than that because people are much more complicated than that.”<sup>23</sup> Further, Dolan and Naidu posit the premise that decision lies in emotion, which makes people remember; everyone remembers where they were on 11 September 2001, for instance. At the core of every story is emotion, which is how the bond between storyteller and listener is created.<sup>24</sup> Scholars exploring storytelling and narrative in healthcare found that individuals’ stories can display the similarities and differences between their experiences.<sup>25</sup> Stories deliver perceptions and meanings that, when told, allow others to place themselves within the stories to validate or dismiss aspects of the stories. Illustrations of aspects of narrative paradigm theory embedded within Marines’ stories that focus on the values of loyalty, humility, and courage in the face of fear and death instill basic human emotions with which all audiences can identify.

There exists risk and reward for leaders willing to reveal their humanity to those within their teams, as it opens the discussion to teachability, redirection, and adaptation. Jack Harris and B. Kim Barnes wrote, “Self-disclosure through storytelling is a powerful method of engaging and inspiring others. As a respected and admired leader, a story disclosing a failure can have the somewhat paradoxical effect of building trust and encouraging openness.”<sup>26</sup> Each of the Commandants volunteers such stories of error, or ignorance, or regret, because others can identify with them and they appeal to their shared humanity.

<sup>23</sup> Gabrielle Dolan and Yamini Naidu, *Hooked: How Leaders Connect, Engage and Inspire with Storytelling* (Queensland: John Wiley and Sons Australia, 2013), 40.

<sup>24</sup> Dolan and Naidu, *Hooked*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Leah East et al., “Storytelling: An Approach that Can Help to Develop Resilience,” *Nurse Researcher* 17, no. 3 (April 2010): 17–25, <https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2010.04.17.3.17.c7742>.

<sup>26</sup> Jack Harris and B. Kim Barnes, “Leadership Storytelling,” *Industrial and Commercial Training* 38, no. 7 (December 2006): 351.

## Analysis of Artifacts

Three artifacts are used to explore the narrative techniques of Marine leaders instinctively, yet skillfully, drawing on Fisher’s narrative theory. All three are recorded discussions regarding recollections of past events, with minor direction by the interviewer, who, in each case, was either a Marine or civilian employee of the Service. The artifact of General Berger’s interview was created by Representative Michael Gallagher for a webcast filmed in December 2020 and published February 2021. Berger was interviewed while currently serving as Commandant and presumably at Marine Barracks Washington, DC. The interviews of Generals Cates and Shepherd were conducted for the Marine Corps History Division Oral History Program in the mid-1960s. Cates and Shepherd were each interviewed after retirement while in their early 70s. They were recorded on audio tapes, which were transcribed and typewritten, and handwritten notes were made on the transcripts by the Commandants themselves, which are included in the artifacts. Story selections are taken from each artifact. Included here are context, quotes, and paraphrases of a total of nine stories.

Each story from these artifacts was selected for its unique illustration of the history and culture attributes addressed by Fisher’s theory. Analysis of the theory’s aspects—history, biography, culture, character, coherence, and fidelity—are mapped out for each story. The Marine Corps’ core values, leadership traits, and leadership principles are frequently referenced regarding the culture and character tests of the theory.<sup>27</sup> The reader is encouraged to read the entire artifact, available through the Marine Corps History Division, as these are a tiny fraction of the wealth of narration offered by these leaders. Both Cates and Shepherd, who fought at Belleau Wood and other pivotal, ferocious World War I battles, were highly decorated and repeatedly wounded in the early months of their careers. Finally, each artifact will be considered for its usefulness as a tool of persuasion to support Marines or the Marine Corps.

<sup>27</sup> Item 4, “Qualities,” in “QPME: History and Traditions of the United States Marine Corps: Ethics, Values, and Leadership Development,” Marine Corps University Research Library, 27 August 2021.

## General Clifton B. Cates

### *Narrative No. 1:*

#### *Put Lofty Dreams Aside Voluntarily*

General Cates was Commandant just after World War II from 1948 to 1952. He was commissioned in 1917, but he had never heard of a Marine prior to that, and put off practicing law to serve his country.

MR. FRANK: What impelled you to join the Marine Corps?

GENERAL CATES: That's rather an odd story. As I said, I was getting ready to take the state bar examination and I happened to run into the son of the president of the University. And I asked him, "Has your dad had any calls for people going into the service?" And he said, "Not that I know of." I said, "Well, if he does, put my name down."

About two weeks later I saw him, and he said, "Dad has a letter from the Marine Corps wanting eight Second Lieutenant reservists. Do you want to apply?" And I said, "What in the hell is that outfit?" I really didn't know. And I said, "Yes, put my name down." And that's the way it started.<sup>28</sup>

### Analysis:

- *History.* Displays how the Corps recruited from within universities during World War I.
- *Biography.* Cates's start in the Marine Corps.
- *Culture.* Applies to leadership principle no. 11: seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions.<sup>29</sup>
- *Character.* Cates voluntarily left law practice to serve his country, displaying the leadership trait of unselfishness.
- *Coherence.* It shows the timeline of his life decisions to join the Corps.

- *Fidelity.* It rings true because it indicates how Cates's patriotism led to service to his country and Corps.
- *Persuasiveness.* It provides an example of a change in life's trajectory for the good purpose of service to country.

### *Narrative No. 2:*

#### *Disarrayed and Injured but Carried On*

Cates was honored with high valor awards for his courage in France in June 1918. For context, the Battle of Belleau Wood began the day after this event. Cates describes it with humility, without careful scripting, even with regret.

On the night of the fifth of June and we had just gotten back reserve and gotten cleaned up when Major Holcomb got an order to attack at five o'clock—it was then twenty minutes to five and we were a good kilometer from our jumping off place. So, we double-timed part of the way and got into position, and actually we didn't know our objective or where we were going or what. We were deployed across this wheat field and taking very heavy fire—my platoon was. We received word that Captain [Donald F.] Duncan had been killed—the company commander. So, with that I yelled to this Lieutenant [James] Robertson, I said, "Come on, Robertson, let's go." And with that we jumped up and swarmed across a wheat field toward about two-thirds of the way I caught a machine gun bullet on the helmet. It put a great big dent in my helmet and knocked me unconscious. So, Robertson, with the remainder of my platoon, entered the west part of the Bouresches, and evidently, I must have been out for five or ten minutes. When I came to, I remember trying to put my helmet on and the dog-

<sup>28</sup> Oral history content presented throughout the article is transcribed exactly as published in the original. Gen Clifton B. Cates, interview with Benis M. Frank, session 1, 1967, transcript (Oral History Section, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA), 3–4, hereafter Cates oral history.

<sup>29</sup> "Marine Corps Leadership Principles," in *Leading Marines*, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 5-10 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2018), 2-6.

gone thing wouldn't go on. There was a great big dent in it as big as your fist. The machine gun bullets were hitting around, and it looked like hail. My first thought was to run to the rear. I hate to admit it, but that was it. Then I looked over to the right of the ravine and I saw four Marines in this ravine. So, I went staggering over there—I fell two or three times, so they told me—and ran in and got these four Marines. Then about that time I saw Lieutenant Robertson who, with the remainder of my platoon, was leaving the western end of town. So, then I yelled at him and I blew my whistle, and he came over and he said, “all right you take your platoon in and clean out the town and I'll get reinforcements,” which I thought was a hell of a thing.<sup>30</sup>

Moments later, Cates was shot again, twice. One bullet was deflected by his helmet and another lodged in his shoulder. He continued:

We cleaned out most of the town but by that time I had, I think it was, twenty-one men left. So, I just posted them in four different posts around the town and set up a kind of a Cossack post. Within an hour though, the 79th Company came in and with Major [Randolph T.] Zane—Captain Zane. From then on there wasn't any question about holding the town. I mean, in two or three hours we had enough men in there to hold half a dozen towns.<sup>31</sup>

Analysis:

- *History*. Describes first moment of Battle of Belleau Wood.

- *Biography*. His early heroism as a first lieutenant, taking over for fallen company commander, and saving the town of Bouresches, despite vast losses.
- *Culture*. Applies to Marine Corps leadership principle no. 5: set the example.<sup>32</sup>
- *Character*. Led through to victory with no direction, showing the leadership trait of decisiveness.
- *Coherence*. Holds together because it shows the reality of battlefield chaos.
- *Fidelity*. Rings true due to repeatedly encountering injury, loss, disorder, and fear.
- *Persuasiveness*. An inspiring example of ordinary young officer leading and winning an important victory.

### *Narrative No. 3: Discussion of Errors Openly*

Cates skillfully discussed a concern he had of friendly fire, although it was not stated in such terms.

MR. FRANK: How long did you have to hold Bouresches? How long were you there?

GENERAL CATES: We were there until the night of the tenth. But, you see, we were pretty badly chewed up and we took terrific fire while in Bouresches. I mean the Germans laid it on us. In fact, we had a mystery there that has never been cleared up. It was a twelve- or fourteen-inch gun that fired once every twenty minutes into the town. And the people in the rear swore and be-damned it was a German gun but there wasn't any question about it. I went way back down the ravine and I could hear the damned shells coming from the south and I'd watch it and hear it go right over and hit in the town. We understood it was one of the big railway guns—naval guns.

MR. FRANK: One of ours.

GENERAL CATES: Admiral [Charles P.] Plunkett had; I think. We never could verify that, but we heard that was it.

<sup>30</sup> Cates oral history, 18–20.

<sup>31</sup> Cates oral history, 18–20.

<sup>32</sup> “Marine Corps Leadership Principles,” 2–6.

MR. FRANK: There's one in every war. It's like the one at Guadalcanal.

GENERAL CATES: Luckily, the thing was hitting right in the center of the town and practically ninety per cent of our men were out on the perimeter. So, it didn't do too much damage except to morale.

MR. FRANK: To know that you were being shot, suspecting that you were being shot at . . .

GENERAL CATES: And we couldn't stop it. It kept up for thirteen hours. As I say, we actually didn't have a good counterattack along there. Luckily, the Germans didn't counterattack.<sup>33</sup>

#### Analysis:

- *History*. Reveals rare details of the iconic Battle at Belleau Wood.
- *Biography*. His detailed participation and leadership in one of the most important battles in U.S. history.
- *Culture*. Applies leadership principle no. 3: know your Marines and look out for their welfare.<sup>34</sup>
- *Character*. He had the integrity to investigate, as best he could with the access he had, his suspicions and had the emotional intelligence to realize the impact of so much fire on his Marines' morale, showing integrity and initiative.
- *Coherence*. Story walks through from the beginning of his realization to his investigation, and then the resolution of waiting it out.
- *Fidelity*. The reality of friendly fire rings true.
- *Persuasiveness*. Illustrates that Marine leaders care for their troops, even to identify errors by their peers.

#### ***Narrative No. 4: Humble Leader***

Cates displays cultural humility in the following brief exchange.

MR. FRANK: How would you compare from a personal point of view participating in World War I—the fighting in World War I and the fighting in World War II?

GENERAL CATES: Well, I don't know whether I correctly understand you or not, but I might say there was a lot of difference fighting as a Second Lieutenant and fighting as a Colonel and a Major General. In fact, in World War II I didn't have any close calls at all that I remember.<sup>35</sup>

#### Analysis:

- *History*. Refers to Marine Corps participation in two World Wars.
- *Biography*. Identifies a Marine officer's span of rank and experiences during two wars.
- *Culture*. Applies core value (no. 2) of courage to tell the truth.<sup>36</sup>
- *Character*. Displays Cates's integrity by honestly saying that the lower ranks face the harshest battle.
- *Coherence*. Experiences related span the range from junior to senior officer with respect to how far he went into harm's way.
- *Fidelity*. That high-ranking officers are rarely and that junior officers are often in harm's way easily rings true.
- *Persuasiveness*. An example revealing how senior leaders value the great risks that lower-ranking Marines experience.

### **General Lemuel C. Shepherd**

General Shepherd was Commandant following Cates, from 1952–56. Like Cates, he was commissioned in 1917. He sailed for France after graduating from Virginia Military Institute. His narration differs from Cates's as less anecdotal and more philosophical, and it also meets the narrative paradigm theory criteria of addressing history, biography, culture, and character

<sup>33</sup> Cates oral history, 21–22.

<sup>34</sup> "Marine Corps Leadership Principles," 2–6.

<sup>35</sup> Cates oral history, 43.

<sup>36</sup> "Our Core Values," in *Leading Marines*, 1–7.



with coherence and fidelity despite approaching storytelling from a more sentimental angle.

### *Narrative No. 5: Soul-Baring Praise*

In several exchanges with his interviewers, Shepherd discussed his relationship with Major General Charles D. Barrett. Barret died under questionable circumstances while serving in the Pacific in 1943, having just been relieved of his command. Shepherd's decision to share his feelings about a beloved mentor of the 1960s Marine Corps culture is disarming in its intimacy. Here are a few of the unexpected stories:

SHEPHERD: You may no[t] agree with me, and I admit my opinion may be influenced by my great devotion to Charlie Barrett. I knew him personally and discussed amphibious doctrine with him on many occasions. He was closer to me than my father. I mean, I say professionally. My father was a doctor in Norfolk, and I seldom saw him when I was a boy because he was practicing medicine night and day. He had the biggest obstetrical practice in Virginia and was gone all the time. But I grew to know Charlie Barrett intimately especially when we went back to France together after the war to make a relief map of the Belleau Wood Battlefield.

During this period, we became close friends. Some years later I was a student in the senior class of the Marine Corps Schools while he was an instructor. Barrett had just come back from the Ecole d'Guerre in [Paris] France and was well versed in modern warfare. He was an enthusiastic supporter of the amphibious concept. I recall his discussing sending reconnaissance patrols ashore from a submarine. He said: "now we send out patrols when we are engaged in combat ashore to determine the strength and location of the enemy." He once said to me, "Why can't we send patrols off a submarine to make a reconnaissance of the hostile shoreline and locate the enemy's defenses?" This was the concept, which was often followed during World War II, of making

a reconnaissance of the beaches before a landing was made. This is an example of Barrett's forward thinking on amphibious operations for which I believe historians should give him full credit.<sup>37</sup>

Analysis:

- *History.* Development of amphibious warfare via research after the Battle of Belleau Wood and other World War I locations.
- *Biography.* Shepherd describes a Marine Corps leader who strongly influenced him.
- *Culture.* Shows Shepherd applied leadership principle no. 2: know yourself and seek self-improvement.<sup>38</sup>
- *Character.* Displayed loyalty by his profound respect for his mentor and interest in defending his reputation.
- *Coherence.* He reasonably explains an illustration of his reasons for his positive experience of a criticized leader.
- *Fidelity.* Such experiences of developing devotion for a leader one works with for many years ring true.
- *Persuasiveness.* Describes opportunities for long-term mentoring.

### *Narrative No. 6: Unexpectedly Unassuming*

Shepherd seemed to doubt whether his interviewers wanted to hear more about Barrett and, with humility, asked their permission to carry on. Perhaps Shepherd was so unassuming because he wanted to rally for Barrett's challenged reputation via personal illustration.

SHEPHERD: My first association with Barrett was when I was ordered to the Fourth Brigade Headquarters while I was on occupation duty on the Rhine following the Armistice of World War I. Are you interested?

Q: Yes, sir. Keep right on.

<sup>37</sup> Gen Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr., interview with Benis M. Frank and Robert Heintz Jr., 27 July 1966, transcript (Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA), 7, hereafter Shepherd oral history.

<sup>38</sup> "Marine Corps Leadership Principles," 2-6.

SHEPHERD: I was ordered to Brigade Headquarters in July, just after the Army of Occupation on the Rhine began its march on Berlin before the Germans signed the peace treaty. You know they wouldn't sign, so we started marching and got up to the border of the occupied zone. This move forced the Germans to sign the Versailles Peace Treaty in 1919.

Q: That was when [Marshal Ferdinand] Foch moved?

SHEPHERD: Yes, moved forward. I had the leading company of the Second Battalion, 5th Marines which was the advance guard. The battalion was ordered to jump off at nine o'clock at night. We were lined up on the perimeter ready to go at eight o'clock that night when we received word that the Germans had signed and to return to our billets. Upon my return to Segendorf, I found orders assigning me to the Staff of the Fourth Marine Brigade. It was very soon after that the Brigade returned to the States. Barrett was the Brigade Chief-of-Staff and I served directly under him so had the opportunity to become well acquainted with him and learned to admire his fine qualities and able mind. Just to show you how the man's brain worked, he had a forward-thinking concept about history. He said, now Belleau Wood is the greatest battle in which the Marines have participated in a long time. We should make a relief map of this battlefield. You know he was a great cartographer. That was his specialty. I mean he was an expert in topography which he had taught at the Marine Corps Schools. He said, "I think we ought to go back to Belleau Woods and make a relief map of the area for historical purposes."<sup>39</sup>

Shepherd returned to France and the team completed the task. Later, Shepherd learned that Marines were not represented in the memorial to American troops at Belleau Wood. He took on the project of a memo-

rial while Commandant, enlisting Marine Corps War Memorial sculptor Felix de Weldon to create the item, and sourced all the funds.<sup>40</sup>

Analysis:

- *History*. Refers to the end of World War I and the Marine Corps' role in Allied forces' war-winning counterattack.
- *Biography*. Shepherd's role in the war's end and participation in historical mapping.
- *Culture*. Developing warfare strategy by applying leadership principle no. 1: be technically and tactically proficient.<sup>41</sup>
- *Character*. Shepherd displayed knowledge and enthusiasm for history's lessons.
- *Coherence*. The story holds together, although the time span while in France at the end of the World War I is not well contextualized.
- *Fidelity*. Shepherd complimenting his mentor and explaining how they came to go back to France for further research rings true.
- *Persuasiveness*. An example of the education and research opportunities that can arise while serving in the Marine Corps.

## General David H. Berger

More than half a century later, and on topics not related to warfare, Commandant General Berger used narrative in the same ways Cates and Shepherd had done. Berger used narrative to bond with his audience and break down the barriers of rank and power. As Berger seeks to draw innovation toward the Marine Corps while the pace of innovating is accelerating constantly, narrative paradigm theory may assist that effort.<sup>42</sup> As the Commandant tries to connect with those in the Marine Corps community who care about the future of U.S. defense, he is competing with cor-

<sup>40</sup> Shepherd oral history, 11–13.

<sup>41</sup> "Marine Corps Leadership Principles," 2–6.

<sup>42</sup> Stew Magnuson, "JUST IN: Commandant Calls Marine Corps Tech Refresh 'Urgent,'" *National Defense Magazine*, 2 February 2021; MC2 Tom Tonthat, "Commandant Explores Student Research, Addresses Marines During Visit to NPS," *News*, Naval Postgraduate School, 13 December 2019; and Sgt Megan Roses, "Fighters of the Future," Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, 26 May 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Shepherd oral history, 8.

porate opportunities for brilliant technology-minded young professionals. Such prospects offer higher pay and more immediate liberties to prospective commissioned officers. This enables Marine officer candidates to envision what they could potentially gain by a career in the Marine Corps, regardless of their origins. In these artifacts, Berger, like Cates and Shepherd before him, pulled back the curtain on the highest echelon of Marine Corps mystique. Berger revealed his story of an average start in life, and his audience sees where he landed. Through this narration, his audience is offered a bond with his ordinary beginnings and a connection to his journey, exemplifying opportunities to impact the future of the Marine Corps.

### ***Narrative No. 7: Rural and Ordinary Beginnings***

GALLAGHER: Well, so where does the story begin for you? General Berger? Where are you from and what kind of family you grew up in? Was it a military family?

BERGER: It was not. I grew up in Maryland. My dad was in the Air Force for a couple of years, few years as an officer in the, like the late mid-fifties kind of timeframe.

As an engineer, electrical engineer, and then went into the National Security Agency [NSA], like in the early days when nobody knew was talking about it. So, he worked at Fort Meade all the way for 30-some years and retired from there. And I don't think he, I didn't know what he did probably until I was a captain, it just—went to Fort Meade, came home, and that was sort of all that anybody knew.

So, we, I grew up on a farm in Maryland and my dad went to Fort Meade and my mom ran our farm. And probably like you, I'm not afraid of very many things as a Marine, except for, except for my mom. And even now, you know, I wouldn't cross her. If I got sideways with her, she put me down like probably I deserve, but she did, she was capable of [it] back then.

So, all of my values growing up, came from—I am so fortunate because I had the

mom and dad and family that other people never had. I had that. So, I had my dad, is the smartest person that I have ever known. And my mom has all the fortitude and strengthened decisiveness and all I'd like to have.<sup>43</sup>

#### Analysis:

- *History.* Describes the NSA during 1960s and 1970s as a rather invisible organization despite being near Washington, DC.
- *Biography.* Berger shared the circumstances of an idyllic family life when he was a child.
- *Culture.* Validates the very ordinary beginnings of most Marines.
- *Character.* He shares his devotion to his parents and the trait of loyalty.
- *Coherence.* The story is a nice summation of his upbringing and family circumstances.
- *Fidelity.* The quiet nature of his father and leadership of his mother rings true as an apparently stable middle-class family.
- *Persuasiveness.* Validates and inspires through the reality that every Marine has the opportunity to rise very high in rank.

### ***Narrative No. 8: A Young Scholar***

Berger continued by describing how, despite his ideal upbringing, he was not motivated for military service. He then found inspiration in a Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) gunnery sergeant, which seemed a random motivation, but that matters little considering the vulnerability shared.

And my dad told me what you should do is apply for ROTC because they'll pay for college and we weren't poor, but I thought this pretty great idea. So, I applied for an Air Force and Navy and Army ROTC and ended up within the ROTC scholarship. And that lasted all of one year. At Tulane. I actually, I barely lasted one year, the first year in New Orleans, just to be flat out honest, but fortunately for me, the

<sup>43</sup> Gallagher, "New Look at the Marine Corps with General David H. Berger," 02:17–03:51 min.

planets aligned because there was a gunnery sergeant at the ROTC unit.

And I had never met a Marine, never in high school, no recruiter, nothing. Didn't know anything about the military or Marines. Didn't know anything until I met him. And it was like, whenever that is, you know, when you run across that. That's whenever that is. I want sort of—that's my goal. So, then I tried to switch into the Marine Corps and dig out of academic probation at the same time.

So, after all that, then that was my, that was my background. I only went to the military because they paid for college and my dad suggested they will pay for it. And not only went into the Marine Corps because [I] ran into a gunny and that was, holy cow, I've never seen anything like that, but that was what I wanted to do too.<sup>44</sup>

#### Analysis:

- *History.* Story describes the Navy and Army ROTC environment at Tulane University in the 1980s.
- *Biography.* Berger's service began after being inspired by meeting a gunnery sergeant.
- *Culture.* The leadership trait of bearing in that gunny launched a 40-year career in Berger, and probably others.
- *Character.* Both Berger and that gunny exemplify leadership principle no. 5: set the example.<sup>45</sup>
- *Coherence.* The story nicely forms up the season of Berger's Marine Corps beginning.
- *Fidelity.* One Marine can inspire others to serve the Corps, as this example shows, so it does ring true.
- *Persuasiveness.* Demonstrates the attraction to the Marine Corps does not have to be complex, such as childhood study of battles; it can

be launched by encountering one inspiring person.

#### *Narrative No. 9: Three Days to Four Decades*

Berger shared an unexpected pact he made with his wife when he was first commissioned in 1981. Sharing an intimate marital detail is the kind of unique storytelling Fisher outlined in narrative paradigm theory.<sup>46</sup>

GALLAGHER: And where were you taking it? Kind of in two-, three-year increments, early on in your career? And so, what was the moment at which you decided, okay, I'm going to make a full-on career.

BERGER: This actually, for me, I think it's different than for my wife, Donna. She, I think she would tell you, instead of a moment for me, we sort of had a pact.

I don't remember at what stage, but it was somewhere in there in the lieutenant kind of early captain stage where—And I don't know. I don't even know why I came up with this, but I said, if I ever have three days in a row where I don't want to go to work, then I'll get out happy, a happy man. And really you know, I'm proud of what little contribution I made.

So, I had one for sure, but I never had three in a row where I just don't want to go put my uniform on and go in. And that's, so it's not a day for me. I figured everybody has bumps along the way, but it's three days in a row. If you're hating to go to work. Okay. It's time to do something else. And I haven't had, haven't had three days.

GALLAGHER: That's amazing. And a testament to your wife that she was willing to serve the country by letting you do this job for so long.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Gallagher, "New Look at the Marine Corps with General David H. Berger," 04:08–05:30 min.

<sup>45</sup> "Marine Corps Leadership Principles," 2–6.

<sup>46</sup> Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm," 7–8.

<sup>47</sup> Gallagher, "New Look at the Marine Corps with General David H. Berger," 11:50–13:02 min.

Analysis:

- *History*. Describes Berger's personal Marine Corps history.
- *Biography*. Illustration of the impact of his marriage on his career.
- *Culture*. This narrative is an example of the leadership trait of endurance, or how endurance is achieved.
- *Character*. The core value of commitment and the trait of decisiveness are exhibited here.
- *Coherence*. Berger's personal criteria for professional success make a completed narrative.
- *Fidelity*. Although a rather intimate personal guideline, it is believable.
- *Persuasiveness*. A good example of the value of military spouses and their role in successful service.

## Theory Applied to Commandants' Narratives

As the narrative analysis shows, these stories each pass the narrative paradigm theory tests, which means they are instruments of persuasion. Referring back to the Marine Corps' definition of strategic communication, these narratives are communication activities that provided accurate information that informed and educated about the missions, organizations, capabilities, needs, activities, and performance of the Marine Corps as an instrument of national defense. There is an exception for the COMMSTRAT definition's term *timely*, which was excluded as these leaders were discussing matters of historical, not current, significance. How narrative paradigm theory is used in civilian organizational leadership is a well-explored topic. The next section explores this topic in more general terms.

## Commandants' Use of Narrative Coherence

Self-deprecation, lack of arrogance or insult to others, praise of the underdog, and praise of the criticized are all the types of checkboxes junior Marines—the ones whose lives are most at risk in combat and in training—look for when listening to a leader, and they are listening carefully. These nine stories pass the narrative

paradigm theory test of coherence with these narrative elements. Marines must trust their leaders implicitly, because when their leaders tell them to charge the enemy, they have to know they are doing the right thing for Corps and country. Marines develop that trust not only listening to leaders, but they also talk to those under their command in the exact same way.

## Commandants' Use of Narrative Fidelity

Military training teaches observation of inconsistency, incongruence, and lack of "fit," so looking for narrative fidelity is something that comes naturally to Marines. Not unexpectedly, Cates, Shepherd, and Berger knew the general public would be their harshest audiences while knowing their Marine Corps audience would likely simply listen, rapt with attention, absorbing the stories of one whose experiences closely align with their own. In the case of these nine stories, any skeptic would likely be disarmed, primarily because the Commandants appear so humble, modest, and unpretentious. Even critical experts on the world wars in France and the Pacific could little argue with the personal experiences put forth by Cates and Shepherd. Their stories, although solid in fact and logic, primarily connect with the audience on an emotional level. That is the role the narrative value *rings true* plays in solidifying the Marine Corps' message through narration.

Perhaps upcoming research for these authors includes learning what aspect of Fisher's Marine Corps service may have influenced his theory. His experience in the Corps was not typical. Surviving the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir in Korea, which resulted in more than 17,800 U.S. casualties, under the direst battle conditions likely had a great impact on him. So, his integration of strategic storytelling into the process of decision-making brings many questions to mind for any Marine Corps historian, including what narratives Fisher heard that inspired his service.

## Article Implications

Perhaps a deeper understanding of Fisher's theory can create something of a paradigm shift in military

leadership communication, especially for senior commissioned officers. In many ways, Commandants naturally adhere to Fisher's theory; they are inclined to spread the word of Marine Corps history, culture, and character through the strategic use of compelling narratives. Thus, it is reasonable to propose that Commandants intentionally use narratives as strategic communication to expand their audience, no matter how incremental. These narratives may attract highly intelligent technical young minds toward the Marine Corps, where they can advance innovation. This article has explored the idea that, without knowing they were doing so, Commandants of the 1950s instinctively applied the principles of narrative paradigm theory in their rhetoric and interviews. Cates and Shepherd are on a short list of distinguished Marines in the Marine Corps University Library, where future research may further explore how Fisher's narrative paradigm theory might be present in other Marine Corps narrations.

## Conclusion

This article has explored how Fisher's narrative paradigm theory explains why storytelling has been an

effective and strategic communication tool employed by Marine Corps Commandants to engage audiences in support of the Corps.<sup>48</sup> First, narrative paradigm theory was dissected regarding the narrative use of history, biography, culture, and character, followed by discussion of the twin tests of narrative coherence and narrative fidelity—all amounting to the logic of good reasons. Second, in the literature review, consideration of Fisher's three essays in response to scholarly critique of narrative paradigm theory was followed by academic exploration of uses of story by organizational leaders. Third, the three artifacts, including nine stories, were presented, and analyzed as adhering to Fisher's theory. Finally, the implications of the article include recommending that Commandants consider narrative paradigm theory as part of their strategic communication toolkit due to its ability to attract people to the Marine Corps community and support the future of the Corps. The benefit to the Corps is that such storytelling breaks down hierarchical barriers, allows audiences to make sense of the problems the Corps faces, and motivates them to participate in the solutions.

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<sup>48</sup> Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm," 364–65.

# BOOK REVIEWS

*Major Peter L. Belmonte, U.S. Air Force (Ret)*

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*The 4th Marine Brigade at Belleau Wood and Soissons: History and Battlefield Guide.* By J. Michael Miller. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2020. Pp. 488. \$65.00, cloth; \$27.95, paperback.)

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Belleau Wood: the name reverberates in American memory even today, more than 100 years after it first came to public attention. In this book, author J. Michael Miller, a former lead historian at the Marine Corps History Division, delves deeply into the Battle of Belleau Wood and the Battle of Soissons, fought less than a month later, to explain what these two battles meant to the Allies in 1918 and to Marine Corps history in general. Secondarily, Miller designed the book to be used as a battlefield guide for the prospective traveler.

While the focus of the book is the 4th Brigade of the U.S. 2d Division, Miller also discusses the U.S. Army units of the division and how they interacted with the Marine brigade during the two battles. For Belleau Wood, Miller covers the Marine brigade's movements and fighting from 1 June through 6 June 1918 in a fair amount of detail. In particular, his account of the fighting on 5 and 6 June is a fine example of combat narrative based on small units. Unfortunately, the author ends the Belleau Wood combat description on 6 June; there was still plenty of fighting to occur before the wood could be reported as being fully under American control.

After a brief hiatus to discuss strategy, Miller plunges readers back into the whirlpool of combat at Soissons. His discussion of the confusion in command and the disorganized approach to the battlefield will leave readers wondering how the division performed as well as it did during the battle. The disorganiza-

tion that characterized the advance to the jump-off line continued after the battle began. Miller vividly describes the confused intermingling of troops. Marines, soldiers, Moroccans, French, and even several stray units of the 1st Division far to the north mingled at various times and places during the savage battle. The author's combat narrative covers 18 and 19 July in graphic detail; seemingly no platoon is omitted. Although the division had failed to reach its objective at Soissons, it came very close. Indeed, Miller tells us that

you can judge for yourself how close the attack came to success. Had the reserve of the 6th Marines and the 6th Machine Gun Battalion gone forward on July 18 to follow up the attack by the 5th Marines and 3rd Army Brigade, perhaps the Soissons—Chateau-Thierry Road could have been breached. (p. 343)

This is true, but of course hindsight is 20/20, especially so in military history. In any event, the two days of battle had driven home to the Germans that the Marne salient was untenable, and they soon began a withdrawal.

In his final two chapters, Miller revisits the Army/Marine Corps controversy over publicity and credit, and he discusses “the evolving sentiments of the Marine Corps toward Belleau Wood” (p. 359). According to him, “Belleau Wood was of little strategic value and limited tactical worth to both sides. The real victory at Belleau Wood was one of morale, which in June 1918 meant more than almost any battlefield victory” (p. 363). The attacks at Soissons, however, “were of vital strategic value in

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Maj Peter L. Belmonte, USAF (Ret), holds a master's degree in history from California State University, Stanislaus, and is the author of several books, including *Days of Perfect Hell: The U.S. 26th Infantry Regiment in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, October–November 1918* (2015) and coauthor of *Forgotten Soldiers of World War I: America's Immigrant Doughboys* (with Alexander F. Barnes, 2018).

shifting the advantage to the Allies" (p. 364). Miller aptly sums up: "Even today, Belleau Wood continues to be a symbol of the meaning of World War I to the United States, while Soissons remains in comparative obscurity. In truth, both battles must be interpreted together to better understand the American sacrifices and contributions during World War I" (p. 367).

Interspersed throughout the narrative are chapters called "Belleau Wood Tour" and "Soissons Tour." Each of these sections contains two or three stops, with each stop pertaining to an episode of the battle and including the latitude and longitude of each stop in degrees, minutes, seconds, and tenths of seconds. A brief description tells the reader what happened at each stop, and a map illustrates that particular tour.

The book succeeds as a combat narrative of Belleau Wood and Soissons. Although Miller nicely describes the strategic setting for the battles, command decisions above regimental or brigade level are not examined in depth. The author also discusses casualty figures, the care and burial of the dead, and stories of various Marines, soldiers, and family members.

Miller has marshaled a fine array of sources to produce this narrative. Personal accounts are provided from oral histories, interviews, surveys, questionnaires, and memoirs. Contemporary accounts are taken from letters and newspaper articles, while official histories and secondary sources bolster the narrative. Of special note is Miller's use of German documents to give us an idea of the enemy's point of view. The book is well organized and presented. Twenty-four maps, 12 charts, and 25 photographs support the narrative. Parts of some of the maps are difficult to read, but they are adequate to follow the action and graphically demonstrate the confused, disordered nature of the fighting. End matter includes an order of battle for the Allied and German units in the narrative, copious endnotes, and a wonderful bibliography. This book is highly recommended for anyone who wants to read detailed accounts of the 4th Brigade at Belleau Wood and Soissons. It would be a useful tool to have on hand for anyone desiring to visit these important battlefields.

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## Major Peter L. Belmonte, U.S. Air Force (Ret)

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*The US Volunteers in the Southern Philippines: Counterinsurgency, Pacification, and Collaboration, 1899–1901.* By John Scott Reed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2020. Pp. 328. \$39.95, cloth.)

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More than 120 years ago, Congress created a new category of U.S. Army unit for a specific purpose and for a specific duration. Twenty-five regiments of U.S. Volunteers (USV) made their appearance in 1899 and then faded from the scene two years later. These units and the troops who comprised them are not widely known, but author John Scott Reed hopes to change that. Reed, a history professor at the University of Utah, states his purpose in the first sentence of his preface: “I wrote this book to direct the attention of military historians to the existence and achievements of a ground combat force, the United States Volunteers, which successfully combined the best aspects of the American regular and militia traditions during its brief existence” (p. xi). Specifically, Reed examines the USV against the backdrop of their overall successful mission in the Philippines from 1899 to 1901. To do that, he concentrates on four regiments—the 26th, 29th, 40th, and 43d Infantry Regiments—and their activities in the Southern Philippines. Reed concludes that the USV were successful in combining “military operations with martial law coercion to exhaust guerrilla bands and suppress elite support for continual resistance” (p. 2). This success was due to the previous military experience of a large number of the enlisted troops and officers of the USV and the ingenuity of battalion and company commanders who were stationed at numerous outposts in the islands and thus operated with relative autonomy. The USV’s success, in turn, set the stage for the final success realized by U.S. forces in 1902. Reed effectively uses a wide array

of sources that include U.S. government records and documents as well as U.S. and Filipino primary and secondary sources to present this history.

After examining the strategic situation in the Philippines in the late 1890s, Reed next examines the military and political background in which the USV were conceived. Basically, the USV filled a gap between the outgoing state volunteers and the few regular troops available to prosecute the war. Many of the USV were recently discharged state troops, while the regular Army was filled with recent recruits and newly commissioned officers to make up for combat and disease deaths incurred in 1898. This, the author argues, made for better discipline and performance of the USV in contrast to the regulars.

In the next chapter, Reed examines the supposed collective motives for the men to enlist. His discussion of masculinity and Victorian-era ideas, including Theodore Roosevelt’s ideas of manhood, as well as theories of combat motivation, may well be valid, but such suppositions are generalizations that depend on the varied background experiences of each person. Reed then describes the operations of the four selected regiments in their particular areas of responsibility. After the April 1900 reorganization of the Philippine military command and theater into departments, districts, and subdistricts, USV troops faced the challenge of dispersion. As Reed puts it,

Throughout the Philippine War, the central dilemma for US commanders at all levels was how to secure their departments, districts, and subdistricts with a limited number of regiments, battalions, and companies. Their options ranged between dispersed “circuits” of company or platoon-sized

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post and smaller numbers of larger garrisons. (p. 66)

By examining each area—Samar, Leyte, Panay, and Northern Mindanao—the author effectively compares and contrasts the approach of the many USV outposts and their experiences carrying out coercion and attraction. These two approaches, practiced simultaneously, produced success in each area except Samar.

The author describes the development of counter-guerrilla tactics from the arrival of the USV in 1899 to their redeployment in 1901. Much of this was done on the fly by battalion and company commanders charged with pacifying their assigned areas. Reed addresses the controversial use of the “water treatment” by USV on guerrilla fighters. This involved forcing a person to consume copious amounts of water, forcefully causing them to expel the water, and then repeating the terrifying and painful process. In this regard, Reed’s defense of the restraint shown by the USV and other U.S. troops is well reasoned and convincing. And Reed does not lose sight of the fact that these individuals were products of their time and subject to notions of White supremacy, nor does he justify the acts of abuse and torture committed by some.

Reed devotes two chapters to combat and disease losses and medical care of the USV. Most of the combat deaths occurred during hikes (basically long-range patrols) and ambushes. The diseases most prevalent among troops in the Philippines in 1900 were amoebic dysentery, bacillary dysentery, typhoid fever, and malaria. The dispersed nature of the troops, coupled with insufficient numbers of medical personnel, meant that these troops were hit particularly hard. In addition to tactics, combat duties, and losses, Reed covers the garrison life of the USV—“work routines, mess and billeting arrangements, and the amusements they pursued out of the field and off the duty roster” (p. 5).

Next, Reed examines the internal and external discipline of the USV. Internal discipline “reinforces lines of authority within the force” (p. 165) and is reflected in the degree of cohesion in any unit. External

discipline involved the soldiers’ interaction with the Philippine people. Reed analyzes court martial records and concludes the USV were well disciplined in both areas. According to Reed, his argument

is an attempt not to exculpate fin-de-siècle American white supremacy, but to assert that widely held individual racial values were suppressed by the military justice system out of a necessity to reinforce the national war aim of imposing US sovereignty on the inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago. (pp. 190–91)

Reed believes the USV applied coercive and attractive methods to pacify their assigned areas in the islands more quickly than the depleted regulars could have done at the time. He concludes

Stoically indifferent to wounds, hardship, and illness, they achieved through their tactical skill and discipline a victory that would otherwise only have come at a much greater cost and at a much more difficult return to peace. They served during a US counterinsurgency effort that did not end in failure and excessive, self-defeating violence, or a disillusioned withdrawal before the achievement of the strategic end state. (pp. 197–98)

The book contains no photographs or illustrations, but the author has included four maps that depict the operational areas under consideration. These are not detailed maps depicting battles and units; they serve only to orient readers with regard to the theater. Reed’s 20-page bibliography will give interested readers plenty of ideas for further study. This book is highly recommended for anyone wanting to learn about these unique U.S. Army regiments and how they conducted pacification operations in the Philippines.

## Christopher N. Blaker

*A Grave Misfortune: The USS Indianapolis Tragedy.* By Richard A. Hulver and Peter C. Luebke. *Contributions to Naval History*, no. 7. (Washington, DC: Naval History and Heritage Command, U.S. Department of the Navy, 2018. Pp. 396. \$35.00, paperback; free, e-book.)

Many of those who are familiar with World War II know how the story goes. On 29 July 1945, as the United States and its allies closed in on the Japanese home islands after more than three and a half years of bitter fighting and just weeks before the war was to end, the heavy cruiser USS *Indianapolis* (CA 35) was torpedoed and sunk by a Japanese submarine as it sailed unescorted in the Philippine Sea. Though as many as 800 sailors and Marines of the ship's crew of 1,195 managed to escape the sinking vessel and get into the water or into life rafts alive, it was not until 84 hours later that the survivors were sighted by a Navy plane and rescue operations began. Numerous errors contributed to this delay in locating the *Indianapolis*'s crew, including the failure of port authorities to note the ship's absence at Leyte, Philippines; the dismissal of an intercepted Japanese report of the sinking as untrue; and the neglect of a report of a U.S. Army Air Forces pilot who had spotted flares that had been fired by the survivors drifting at sea. By the time American seaplanes and ships reached the scene to begin fishing men out of the water, just 320 remained alive.<sup>1</sup>

As the news broke and circulated throughout the Pacific in the following weeks, sailors and Marines of the U.S. Fleet were shocked and saddened to learn of the loss of the proud *Indianapolis*, a decorated veteran of 10 major combat operations of World War II, and the three-and-a-half-day nightmare at sea its crew

experienced. The ship's final mission had been to deliver to the island of Tinian components for the first atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, on 6 August. The bomb helped hasten the end of the war, but in a tragic twist of irony, so many of the *Indianapolis*'s crew did not live long enough to see it.

In subsequent years, as new details emerged regarding the sinking as well as the particularly controversial court martialing of the *Indianapolis*'s skipper, Navy captain Charles B. McVay III for "endangering his ship through negligence by failing to zigzag when U.S. Navy tactical doctrine deemed it prudent," naval officers, sailors, journalists, and historians alike began picking apart the incident to highlight new evidence or counter existing claims, a practice that continues to this day (p. xxiv). Eminent naval historian Samuel Eliot Morison called the loss of the *Indianapolis* both a "tale of routine stupidity and unnecessary suffering" and a "preventable tragedy."<sup>2</sup> The National WWII Museum in New Orleans, Louisiana, labels it "one of the worst—and most controversial—tragedies in U.S. Navy history."<sup>3</sup> Bestselling author Lynn Vincent and film director Sara Vladoic write that in addition to it being the "greatest sea disaster in the history of the American Navy," it was also "a national scandal that would bridge two centuries."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Four of those survivors died soon after their rescue, leaving the total number of *Indianapolis* survivors at 316 out of a total crew of 1,195.

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, vol. 14, *Victory in the Pacific, 1945* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), 319; and Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Two-Ocean War: A Short History of the United States Navy in the Second World War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963), 566.

<sup>3</sup> Seth Paridon, "Surviving the Sinking of the USS *Indianapolis*," National WWII Museum, accessed 18 August 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Lynn Vincent and Sara Vladoic, *Indianapolis: The True Story of the Worst Sea Disaster in U.S. Naval History and the Fifty-Year Fight to Exonerate an Innocent Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019), 2.

The Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC) in Washington, DC, rightly titles this episode a “grave misfortune” in its recent release on the subject. Written by NHHC historians Richard A. Hulver and Peter C. Luebke, *A Grave Misfortune: The USS Indianapolis Tragedy* offers military historians and enthusiasts of military history alike a closer look at the full story of the *Indianapolis*, including its illustrious career prior to and during World War II, its sinking and the rescue of survivors, subsequent investigations and the controversies that followed, and commemoration efforts that continue today.

The book offers an assemblage of more than 75 primary-source documents drawn primarily from U.S. Navy records that are organized into six chapters: “Returning to the Forward Area: Atom Bomb Delivery and the Final Voyage”; “Sunk: Firsthand Recollections of the Attack and Time in the Water”; “Rescued”; “Moving Forward: Condolences and Investigations”; “Conviction and Clemency”; and “Remembering *Indianapolis*.” The sources include deck logs and war diaries, after action reports, official military dispatches, war damage and investigation reports, trial transcripts and other legal documents, official and personal correspondence, press releases and newspaper clippings, interviews and oral history transcripts, and written accounts by survivors. By poring over these documents, the authors write, readers will be able “to investigate the story of the *Indianapolis* for themselves, to draw their own conclusions, and to identify topics for further research” (p. xxxiv).

These sources represent but a fraction of what is available in public archives. As the authors explain, “This volume should not be considered the definitive documentary history of *Indianapolis*.” Instead, it should serve as “a representative sample of those documents [that] will lead those who want to learn more about *Indianapolis* to the pertinent archival collections” (p. ix). Nevertheless, the collection of sources included herein is more than sufficient to present an adequate—even near-complete—retelling of the warship’s story. This reviewer was particularly fascinated by transcripts of interviews and oral histories of surviving crewmembers who described in vivid detail the

sinking of the *Indianapolis* and their days-long struggle for survival at sea, fighting off exhaustion, exposure, hunger and thirst, hallucinations, sharks, and even each other. Serious researchers and die-hard buffs of the *Indianapolis* will likely want to do additional digging in a Navy archive to locate even more sources, but for readers simply seeking to learn more about the ship and its sinking, this book will more than do the trick.

In addition to serving as an “example of the Navy’s moral obligation to ensure that the sacrifices of all those who served are not forgotten” by retelling the story of the *Indianapolis*, this volume also seeks to set several facets of the record straight (p. xxxiv). Perhaps the best example of this is found roughly midway through the book, in which Hulver and Luebke use several letters exchanged between Vice Admiral Randall Jacobs, the chief of naval personnel, and Ruth Donnor of Big Rapids, Michigan, to clear up several discrepancies relating to the number of casualties on the *Indianapolis*. Ruth’s son, Radio Technician Second Class Clarence W. Donnor, had been listed as a passenger on the *Indianapolis* when it was sunk and was believed to have been among those lost at sea when he did not turn up with his shipmates at hospitals in the Pacific. As a result, the number of survivors was set at 316, the number of dead at 880. However, Ruth wrote Jacobs several weeks after the sinking to respond to a telegram stating that her son was missing in action, informing the chief of naval personnel that Clarence was in fact alive and well in the United States. As a result, the numbers were corrected to 317 survivors and 879 dead. But, as it turns out, Clarence was actually neither a survivor nor a casualty of the *Indianapolis*. He had not been on the ship during its final voyage, having boarded at Mare Island, California, but disembarked before the ship sailed with orders to attend an officer training school in New York. *A Grave Misfortune* helps set the record straight by listing the *Indianapolis*’s total crew at 1,195; the number of the deceased at 879, and the number of survivors at 316 (pp. 179–82).

The authors also provide additional content that will benefit historians researching the *Indianapolis* as well as those simply interested in learning more about the ship and its crew. Readers will find a list of commanding officers of the *Indianapolis* since the ship’s

commissioning in 1932; a list of battle stars earned for combat participation in World War II; a summary of the final crew present on 29 July 1945; an appendix on conditions of readiness and material conditions; more than 40 relevant photographs and maps; an impeccably detailed foldout illustration of the ship's final inboard profile plans; and a complete roster of the final crew, denoting each servicemember's full name and military rank/rate, separated into groups of survivors and the deceased.

One particular strength of this book is that even though it is published by the U.S. Navy, it does not attempt to avoid or even shy away from the Navy's responsibility in the *Indianapolis* disaster, chiefly in that individuals failed to realize that the ship was overdue at its destination and therefore extended the length of time that its survivors were drifting and dying by the hundreds in the Philippine Sea. "The story of the *Indianapolis* is not an entirely positive one for the U.S. Navy," Hulver and Luebke write, "but as this volume demonstrates, failures were studied and immediately addressed" to "ensure that no Sailor or Marine would again face a similar situation. Escort requirements were stiffened, lifesaving equipment improved, and more rigid movement reporting procedures put in place" (pp. xii, xxiii). The trial and conviction of Captain McVay, which the authors acknowledge "hurt the Navy's reputation and ruined the career of a fine officer," are also covered in great detail herein. All of the lessons learned from the loss of the *Indianapolis* and its controversial aftermath—the good and the bad, the old and the new, and all that are agreed on or still debated today—remain vital to the present-day Navy. One thing, however, is made explicitly clear by the authors: that the captain and crew are to be commended. Their actions "throughout their ordeal, and in the aftermath, stand as exemplars of the highest traditions and honor of the United States Navy" (p. xxiii).

Another strength of this volume is that the authors take care to remind readers that in addition to the 1,158 naval officers and enlisted sailors assigned to the *Indianapolis* on its final voyage, there were 37 Marines serving with the ship's Marine detachment who also suffered at sea. Of those 37 leathernecks, just 9 survived. The death of Captain Edward L. Parke, who died while helping the sailors with whom he was drifting, is mentioned several times. According to Captain McVay, "He was a very strong, athletic man, a young man . . . he just killed himself by exhaustion through trying to keep those people who were swimming away, trying to keep them with the group. He died of exhaustion, from that alone" (p. 41). This reviewer is the first to acknowledge bias for the experiences of seagoing Marines in World War II (his grandfather served in Marine detachments aboard an aircraft carrier and two battleships during the war), but he remains steadfast in his opinion that it is always quite nice to see, especially in this modern era of naval integration, Marines depicted in histories of the U.S. Navy and sailors depicted in histories of the U.S. Marine Corps.

In the end, *A Grave Misfortune* provides a close look at the final heartbreaking chapter of the USS *Indianapolis*'s life, as well as the many years of grief, reflection, and heated debate that followed. Hulver and Luebke wholly succeed in what they set out to achieve with this book by contributing valuable primary-source documents and analysis to the continuing historical conversation on the life and loss of the *Indianapolis*. This reviewer recommends the book to professional historians, students, and enthusiasts of military history, all of whom will gain much from reading it. After all, it is by learning more about the *Indianapolis* that readers can help ensure that the sacrifices of its crew—as well as all those who served in uniform in World War II—are not soon forgotten.

## Robert Dienesch, PhD

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*Blind Bombing: How Microwave Radar Brought the Allies to D-Day and Victory in World War II.* By Norman Fine. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press/Potomac Books, 2019. Pp. 256. \$29.95, cloth and e-book.)

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The usual narrative of the victory in the Second World War weaves a story involving a long-drawn-out struggle to gain control of both the seas and the skies over Europe before the invasion in 1944. The victories at sea and in the air were won slowly and with great sacrifice, but in the end, they paved the way for the battle of Normandy and the eventual liberation of France and the Netherlands, and of course the crushing of Germany. Filled with many dramatic stories of heroism, the tale of final victory usually mentions technology as providing a critical advantage. The North American Aviation P-51 Mustang long-range fighter, for example, stands out in the battle in the skies over Europe. Radar is mentioned, usually with regard to stopping the U-boats, but only as part of the overall struggle. Never is the development of radar discussed in any real detail.

Radar, that lovely technology that has had a major impact on our lives, was a new technology during the Second World War that was generally not understood by most people who used it either directly or indirectly. The development of an effective radar and its deployment was a massive scientific achievement that has never been adequately explained. It helped to shape the war in ways most people simply do not think about; we take it for granted as part of everyday life.

Norman Fine's *Blind Bombing: How Microwave Radar Brought the Allies to D-Day and Victory in World War II* strives to shed light on this important aspect of the war. Aimed at explaining the development of

a 10cm radar system and its use, Fine brings his years of experience in electronics as an engineer to his description of the intricate process of development. An incredibly complicated and delicate piece of equipment, radar was initially underpowered and fragile. The challenge was to make the system more powerful and robust enough to take the rough handling of operations, both at sea and in the air. Taking radar from a very limited piece of electronics operating in very long wavelengths and with only a fraction of the power needed to be useful, Fine produces a chronological account of the wartime research into the 10cm radar. In the process, he also incorporates some direct family connection to the use of radar in bombers within the greater narrative. This produces a history that is both personal and analytical.

Spread out over 12 chapters and bracketed with a prologue and epilogue, *Blind Bombing* starts in the early 1930s, weaving the stories of scientists and military leaders from both the United States and Great Britain into a discussion of the science and engineering of radar. Most importantly, it details how both the British and the Americans were working on radar systems at the same time. Yet, both had encountered major setbacks. Neither nation had the ability to produce effective radar sets on its own, but each had technology and abilities the other needed. The story of effective radar for the war is the story of scientific collaboration, and in some ways pure luck. Britain had the key technology in the form of the cavity magnetron, which amplified the power of the radar system available until it operated in the centimeter wavelengths essential for effective systems. The United States had the industrial capacity and technology to help increase power of the system.

The collaboration between the United States and Britain was a key part of the history. Here, Fine's

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discussion of the Tizard Mission (named for the program's creator Henry Tizard) and the incredible scientists involved in the process of development are important parts of the story. History is, after all, as much about people as events, and there are many who played significant roles behind the scenes. One of the individuals Fine emphasizes was a relative of his who was involved in the first radar-equipped bomber missions. His role in the use of radar over Germany, unknown by the family for years, helps to give the history a more poignant and human face. It also helps to explain the deep and powerful passion the author has for the subject.

While a fascinating and engaging text, it does have a couple of limitations. The first is the fact that the author is fixated on the European war. Radar, especially 10cm-wavelength units, played a huge role in the Pacific, as well. Gunnery radars known as the SG and surface search radars used by the submarine fleet in the form of the SJ system played incredibly important roles. Both gunnery and air search radars played huge roles in many of the battles. The SJ radar was a decisive element in the annihilation of Japanese merchant shipping. By focusing on the Atlantic only, the author fails to illustrate for the reader the massive scale of radar's impact.

Likewise, Fine does not provide any form of operational analysis. We know operational research was a significant part of the war and helped shaped operations and systems. Certainly, studies of radar exist but

they are not part of Fine's account. The inclusion of these reports would have reinforced the history and definitely emphasized the value of this text.

Finally, Fine places a huge emphasis on the influence of radar. He seems to portray it as the key that brought the Allied nations to both the D-Day landings and ultimate victory. This certainly seems to overplay the significance of radar. Radar did not produce victory, although it certainly played an important role in the defeat of the U-boat threat, and it certainly helped the strategic bombing operations. But in both cases, radar was only part of the story. Weapons sink ships, bombs destroy cities, and troops use them. Radar is simply a tool to help accomplish these actions and to improve the effectiveness of naval vessels and aircraft. But Fine argues that radar was the decisive factor in the war, overplaying radar's value in much the same way signals intelligence was initially portrayed when its use was revealed.

This is an incredible text that reveals an aspect of World War II history unfamiliar to many. It explains the origin and development of one of the key technologies of the war. Radar played a huge role in the defense of England, in finding and sinking ships at sea, and in finding and bombing targets on land. It was a true force multiplier. This text is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of science and technology and certainly for those fascinated by the war in Europe. It should certainly be of interest to anyone with a general interest in the Second World War.

## Seth Givens, PhD

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*After Combat: True War Stories from Iraq and Afghanistan.* By Marian Eide and Michael Gibler. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press/Potomac Books, 2018. Pp. 280. \$29.95, cloth and e-book.)

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In 1973, the United States eliminated conscription and instituted the all-volunteer force (AVF), making military service exclusively a choice, not an obligation. The AVF compelled the already-professionalized armed forces to compete in the labor market, which had the effect of making the military look more like American society. Yet, it also created a distinction between those who serve and those who do not. This was seen in stark terms in recent conflicts. More than 2.5 million American servicemembers deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, but the average citizen has no personal connection to those who served.

For Marian Eide and Michael Gibler, professors of English and military science, respectively, at Texas A&M University, this disconnection created a gulf between America's military and its civilian society. This is manifested, the authors believe, in the difficulties Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) veterans have in relating their experiences to those who have not served in uniform. In *After Combat: True War Stories from Iraq and Afghanistan*, Eide and Gibler attempt to dispel common, often sensational tropes of life during deployment and the return home. During four years, the authors interviewed veterans who deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, the Philippines, and the Horn of Africa from a cross-section of the military: soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen, enlisted and officers, and a variety of ages, genders, and races/ethnicities.

Their resulting book is 20 chapters of interview excerpts, covering everything from enlistment or commissioning to deployment, homecoming, and de-

parture from the armed forces. Each chapter therefore follows a theme, breaking down veterans' experiences into component parts. Aside from a short editor's note at the beginning of each chapter that offers the reader a framework for what is to follow, Gibler and Eide sit back and allow the interviewees to speak, all of whose words are unattributed to create a "collective sense of narration" (p. xiv). This anonymity makes the project unique and somewhat of a hybrid: it is not merely a collection of oral histories, but also not an analysis of the Global War on Terrorism. *After Combat* is therefore best suited for the casual reader, a person who is interested in learning about the experience of modern war but who has no previous knowledge.

The bulk of the work focuses on deployment. The authors package observations the casual observer of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan might expect, such as surviving roadside bombs or the low points of one's deployment that seem to increase the distance from home. The divisions start to blur, however, as anecdotes split between chapters like "Explosion," "Combat," and "Close Call" deal with such similar issues that it becomes unclear why they warrant individual discussions. The more personal, obscure aspects of war that interviewees share balance out the repetition. A chapter on the monotony of deployment is unique, as it provides insights into how the experience of living in austere conditions and existing on food that becomes decreasingly appetizing creates a shared misery that, for some veterans, retrospectively becomes nostalgia.

Eide and Gibler do not aim to simplify war. Their intent instead is to complicate what the average American perceives as the typical deployment or homecoming to illustrate that not all veterans' experiences are the same. Location, time, service, unit, and

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the individual person are all important variables. *After Combat* is therefore refreshing, a book that refuses to lay any claim to capturing the definitive experience. For some veterans, esprit de corps was a crucial component of their experience; for others, the “band of brothers” mystique was a cynical myth. Some loved the cultural immersion of a deployment, but others preferred the more familiar environs of a forward operating base. Some veterans are matter-of-fact about killing, while others struggle with self-doubt and worry that they are irreparably changed. Eide and Gibler therefore succeed in convincing the reader that the experience of combat is in the eye of the beholder. Yet, for all their attempts to argue that context matters, they lump together the experiences of OIF and OEF veterans, creating a structure for the book that contradicts the project’s purpose.

The final one-third of the book focuses on homecoming. Monographs on the experience of war, starting with John Keegan’s genre-defining *The Face of Battle* (1976) and American-centric works such as Christopher Hamner’s *Enduring Battle* (2011), generally venture no further than the battlefield. They often hand off to other commentators, who write about the experience of coming home from war, seen notably in David Finkel’s *Thank You for Your Service* (2013). Refreshingly, Eide and Gibler combine the two. The veterans interviewed for *After Combat* push back against the notion that they returned home damaged. To be sure, some veterans have trouble sleeping, suffer agoraphobia, or

prefer avoiding celebrations with fireworks. Yet, their struggles with reintegration into a society are more structural. Infantry tactics honed in a war zone are, in most cases, not transferrable to the workforce, and college classrooms make veterans conscious of their age and background relative to their classmates. Then there is the way in which society attempts to show appreciation for a person’s time in uniform, with the perhaps earnest but now trite acclamation, “Thank you for your service.” From a veteran’s perspective, it is an awkward sentiment, and one that has no natural reply.

The cumulative views of the interviewees in *After Combat* offer glimmers of hope that the communication gap between veterans and civilians is bridgeable, but they also create a more worrying argument about the AVF’s potential unsustainability. Recent commentators on the AVF have come to the same conclusion. Beth Bailey concludes in *America’s Army* (2009) that the volunteer force, though it mirrors society, risks decoupling citizenship from duty and obligation. Andrew J. Bacevich passes a more pessimistic judgment in *Breach of Trust* (2013), among other books, arguing that the trend toward long wars after 11 September 2001 is due to the lack of pain Americans feel, in large part, because the AVF insulates society. Eide and Gibler’s book is a laudable attempt, however small, to rectify this aspect of U.S. civil-military relations. It is not the last word in the conversation, but perhaps it supplies the first few of an opening sentence.

## Daniel R. Hart

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*The Bomb and America's Missile Age.* By Christopher Gainor. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018. Pp. 240. \$49.95, cloth and e-book.)

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The 50th anniversary of the American moon landing was heralded by a spate of retrospectives on American culture. The predominant imagery was of a youthful President John F. Kennedy extolling the nation to be the first to the moon, the brave astronauts answering the call, and the brilliant Wernher von Braun leading the scientific efforts that enabled its success. In *The Bomb and America's Missile Age*, Dr. Christopher Gainor seeks to demythologize this conception by revealing the history of the United States Air Force's development of America's first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), the Atlas. Without this technology, designed to carry nuclear bombs, the space race would have been radically different.

Gainor, an author of four books including *To a Distant Day: The Rocket Pioneers* (2020), is a historian of technology specializing in space exploration and aeronautics. He is the editor of *Quest: The History of Spaceflight Quarterly*, president of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, and a fellow of the British Interplanetary Society.

In *The Bomb and America's Missile Age*, Gainor presents a concise and competent argument for his thesis that the story of the Atlas has been distorted, and the importance of its competition with the Russian R-7 (a.k.a. Semyorka) has been underreported. The book is comprised of 10 mainly chronological chapters ostensibly covering the Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower administrations, and a utile historiographical essay. At just 240 pages, Gainor's accessible précis is capably researched and proficiently organized. Relying on sources from the National Archives, the Library of Congress, the National Aero-

nautics and Space Administration, and relevant related scholarship, Gainor provides no revelations but professionally pursues his thesis.

Though the "Missile Age" is undefined, it is usually classified as occurring from 1954 to 1968, with the Rand Corporation's Bernard Brodie's 1959 *Strategy in the Missile Age* serving as the seminal tome. Gainor instead focuses his work from the end of World War II to the launch of Sputnik, approximately 1945–57, commencing with the internecine competition over missile development between the U.S. Army and Navy, and later the nascent U.S. Air Force (which was separated from the Army in 1947). In the waning days of World War II, there was an intense competition between the United States and the Soviet Union to seize on the rocket technology developed by the Germans. Though the United States "won" this battle (it had access to a captured German V-2 rocket and assembled von Braun and his team of engineers), any strategic planning was met with the political reality of military demobilization and budget cuts. Important political and military leaders, including Air Force general Curtis E. LeMay, doubted the viability of long-range ballistic missiles, believing missile development should be solely for defensive purposes. This posture would be the predominant perspective of American military and political leaders into the early 1950s.

Despite these conditions, there was development in rocketry, most notably by the Air Force contractor Convair under Project MX-774. Though ultimately unsuccessful, it provided valuable lessons for the future. It was not a technical breakthrough or new leadership that brought ICBM development to the forefront, but two unrelated developments, one domestic and one international. In April 1950, the Truman administration adopted as policy National

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Security Council Paper 68 (NSC-68), which called for a massive military build-up to contain the worldwide threat of Communism. That summer saw the outbreak of war on the Korean peninsula. Previously limited funding was now available for researchers, and the Air Force restarted its long-range missile project with Convair under MX-1593 for a ballistic missile named Atlas. The successful November 1952 test of the hydrogen bomb, lighter and more powerful than the existing fission bomb, further accelerated the development of ICBMs. Gainor posits that historians have unduly credited President Eisenhower for Atlas; but Gainor contends it was a greater structural response to the development of nuclear weaponry and the pervasive fear of the Soviets, who successfully tested their first nuclear bomb in August 1953, that ultimately led to the success of the Atlas project.

The development of the Soviet counterpart to the Atlas missile, the R-7, is discussed primarily through the lens of the lack of American intelligence about Soviet progress. After Joseph Stalin's death in March 1953, the Soviet missile program was in disarray, but they managed to beat the Americans to the first successful launch of an ICBM in the summer of 1957 and followed up that autumn with the launch of Sputnik. The American "crisis of confidence" that followed was born out of the mistaken belief that a rocket capable of launching a beach ball-sized satellite into orbit could launch a nuclear weapon anywhere (p. 158). In the end, both the Atlas and the R-7 had short lives as weapons; their long-term utility were as space launch vehicles.

The comprehensive nature of Gainor's research struggles against the brevity of the book, as a number of players and a panoply of military acronyms are introduced. The committees on top of boards on top of ad hoc study groups lend credence to the thesis of Edmund Beard's 1976 book, *Developing the ICBM: A Study in Bureaucratic Politics*, that the Soviets beat the Americans to the first successful launch due to bureaucratic inertia and a late start on the development of the Atlas. The upside is acknowledgment of the largely forgotten characters such as Kaufman Thuma Keller, the president of Chrysler, whom Truman appointed as

missile czar in October 1950, and who proved to be so effective that Eisenhower retained him. There is also Harry Julian Allen of the Ames Aeronautical Laboratory, whose technical solution of the heat re-entry problem was paramount in swaying decision makers' minds to ICBMs.

Though Gainor does not state it, the American father of rocketry would not be the celebrated von Braun, but rather Vannevar Bush, who held various leadership positions in missile development under Franklin D. Roosevelt and Truman. Bush was an early advocate for science and engineering in military research and sought to build bridges between the corporate, academic, and governmental communities. His efforts, however, were often frustrated by military leadership and their political acolytes. Despite being integral to the development of the long-range missile, Bush was a critic of its usage, believing the power of a push-button was chilling.

While Gainor expertly narrates the who and the what of the Atlas's development, an analysis of the whys and hows is sometimes reductive or lacking. He explains that the Air Force had a history of using outside contractors for the development of equipment, as opposed to the Army, which had in-house capability, but he does not examine how this made the Air Force vulnerable and over-reliant. In the early postwar years when the Air Force pursued winged missiles in lieu of ballistic ones, it was only following expert advice that it had no ability to dispute. The Air Force was also present at the creation of the Rand Corporation, which the Air Force used for research and analysis, not equipment. Gainor rightfully points to other historians' perspectives about Rand eroding civilian control of the armed forces, but he does not analyze further. There is neither an explanation as to why American intelligence was derelict in reporting on Soviet missile development, nor an analysis as to why this was ultimately an asset to Americans (the fear of the unknown is greater than of the known). These are minor quibbles, though; Gainor sought to tell a specific story and has succeeded.

The original dream of the rocket was to send humans into space. That dream was diverted when it was

found that it could be used for destruction, not discovery. That the Atlas was used so long and so successfully to fulfill those initial dreams of interplanetary exploration is satisfying. That the “defining weapon system of the Cold War” (p. 1) has never been used is equally

gratifying. Gainor’s effort to show the connections between nuclear weapons and long-range rockets is laudatory and efficiently told. The book is an important primer on the development of American rocket technology and a welcome addition to the historiography.

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## Frank L. Kalesnik, PhD

*Tower of Skulls: A History of the Asia-Pacific War, July 1937–May 1942.* By Richard B. Frank. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2020. Pp. 784. \$40.00, cloth.)

The first of a planned trilogy, Richard Frank's *Tower of Skulls: A History of the Asia-Pacific War, July 1937–May 1942* covers Japan's march of conquest in the Far East from the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War to the fall of Corregidor. While Americans tend to think of the war in the Pacific as a primarily U.S. endeavor, Frank strives to place China's role in the conflict in its proper historical context. The war also involved the British and Dutch as well as Australia, New Zealand, and both Free and Vichy France. Most importantly, the author stresses the most significant players: Asians themselves. Some sought independence from colonial rule, with Japan asserting leadership by establishing the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Others loyally served the Western colonial powers (the Indian Army played a major role in the conflict). While Japan lost the war, Asians gained independence in the post-war period, though not without further bloodshed in protracted conflicts in places such as Vietnam.

A distinguished historian of the Pacific War, Frank's earlier books include *Guadalcanal: The Definitive Account of the Landmark Battle* (1990); *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (1999); and a biography of Douglas MacArthur (2007). A serious scholar, his research encompasses an international assortment of archival and published sources. His books are lengthy but readable, and his latest work will not disappoint readers. Particularly welcome is his emphasis on China. In *Tower of Skulls's* prologue, the author declares, "This first volume, however, already reflects a huge upsurge in the specialist literature on

China, fueled by the release of documentary evidence on both sides of the Taiwan Straits. That literature remains very little read or understood in the United States" (p. 8). Frank delivers on what he promises: a fresh look at the war in Asia and the Pacific placed in a global perspective.

The first seven chapters of the book (the first one-third of the text) focuses on the conflict in China. Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek receives more favorable treatment from Frank than he does from other commentators. He states, "For those steeped in the almost unrelieved negative vision of Chiang Kai-Shek's China created by Gen. Joseph Stillwell and his acolytes, this story, based on a much richer archival base, will serve as a corrective" (p. 8). China struggled to survive against the Japanese onslaught, and the Japanese came to realize they had drawn themselves into a quagmire from which there was no easy exit. Chiang recognized that victory ultimately depended on the war's expansion and involvement of other countries. Initially, support came from Nazi Germany, which provided equipment and advisors (Chiang's best units were those the Germans trained and equipped). When the Germans withdrew after aligning themselves with Japan, the Soviet Union assumed their role, and did so until the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. The Soviets fought the Japanese in undeclared border wars in 1938 and 1939; the Japanese Army's main focus, besides China, was maintaining readiness for war with the Soviet Union.

Germany's conquest of Western Europe in 1940, followed by its invasion of Russia, provided the Japanese with the opportunity to seize European colonies in Southeast Asia and the Indies, where they could obtain the resources denied them by American embargoes on oil and other vital war material. The Pearl

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Dr. Frank L. Kalesnik previously served as chief historian at the Marine Corps History Division. He taught at the Virginia Military Institute and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy and has worked as a command historian for both the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Marine Corps.

Harbor attack in December 1941 was part of a series of spectacular campaigns that overran Malaya, Burma, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, and American territories such as Guam and Wake Island. Frank's analysis of these spectacular campaigns is entertaining as well as insightful (this reviewer particularly enjoyed the two chapters covering operations leading to the fall of Singapore). His character sketches are priceless, particularly his comparison of Joseph W. Stilwell's performance with that of Field Marshal William Slim: "The 1942 Burma Campaign provided the first head-to-head measurement of Stilwell and Slim. It did not favor Stilwell" (p. 486).

*Tower of Skulls* is an excellent addition to World War II scholarship. Well-written and thoroughly researched, it will interest professional historians and general readers alike. The title of the book comes from a letter Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore sent to Japanese poet Yonejiro Noguchi in 1938: "You are building your conception of an Asia which would be raised on a tower of skulls" (p. 95). Frank describes the horrible cost of the war to civilians as well as the military in graphic detail, so the quote is appropriate. This first book in his trilogy tells how that tower was built. This reviewer looks forward to the next two volumes' description of how it was stormed and leveled.

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## Sergeant John T. Phillips, USMCR

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*The Wolves of Helmand: A View from Inside the Den of Modern War.* By Frank “Gus” Biggio. (Washington, DC: Forefront Books, 2020. Pp. 288. \$28.00, cloth; \$13.99, e-book.)

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War memoirs tend to focus on the most intense experiences of combat; the IED-induced mayhem, the chaos of a firefight, the unnaturally cool demeanor of the author under fire. Rarely do such works focus on the emotional mayhem, the chaotic years before and after a deployment, or the unnatural desire to discard one’s empathy for human suffering. In this respect, *The Wolves of Helmand* is unique. It treats the intense experiences of combat as a secondary narrative, while the quiet, daily anxieties and attendant emotional challenges feature as the book’s main subject. As such, if you are looking for a thrilling war memoir, *The Wolves of Helmand* will disappoint; but as an exploration of war as a cornerstone of the warrior’s life, it is exceptional, riveting, and insightful.

The book is structured to mirror the experience of deployment and redeployment, including the often-neglected years before and after. The book cleverly arrives to and returns from the war abruptly, spending appropriately sparse time on the awkward transitions from one airbase to another. The abruptness in movement is matched by the stark contrast in normalcy from a cushy life in Washington, DC, to a rugged existence in Afghanistan, where the normal rules of civilization are suspended in exchange for the barest minimum of the laws of war. The arrival at Patrol Base Jaker, the authors forward-deployed home in Nawa District, is rapid, under the cover of darkness, and accompanied by one of the few firefights of the book. The return to civilian life, represented by a casual round of beers with friends in San Francisco,

is confronted with frank honesty; the contradictory emotions, the confusion, the justified indignance at undignified questions. His treatment of indolent questions like “Was it worth it?” and “Did you kill anybody?” will be familiar to any who have worn the uniform.

*The Wolves of Helmand* also ignores hallmarks of the genre, foregoing tropes of superhuman heroism and self-important narratives in favor of a deeply honest portrayal of humanity on the modern battlefield, encompassing the exhilarating and terrifying, the mundane, quiet, and tragic. As a veteran who returns to duty as a reservist intent to deploy, the author straddles the civil-military divide in a way that speaks for a generation of servicemembers who have joined, deployed, returned, separated, and retired all while the “just” war of our era trudges along without clear progress.

Though published with the benefit of more than a decade of hindsight, the author captures the subtle details of life on deployment. His writing relishes the banal, the daily discomfort, and the anxiety of life on a permeable front line where the adversary and the civilian are interchangeable, with the former ineffable and the latter inviolable. The time since his deployment has also left space for him to explore the traumas of war after his direct participation has ended, particularly the trauma of a war that is regularly derided in headlines.

*The Wolves of Helmand* is special in that its stories are immediately familiar to today’s servicemembers, from the casual polemics against “War by PowerPoint” and civilians’ reflexive “Thank you for your service,” to the unrivaled camaraderie in a squad and the randomness and unpredictability of violence in counterinsurgency. The enduring love for his lost brothers,

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too, resonates with those of us who have lost friends in Iraq and Afghanistan; the emotion behind his brief obituaries leaps from the page and draws the reader, safely at home, closer to Afghanistan and Afghanistan uncomfortably close to home.

Biggio's style is pithy and accessible. He distills overwrought doctrine and unnecessarily convoluted theories of war into a few sentences, and only to give context to his particular experience as a civil affairs officer. His writing overflows with empathy for Afghans, his fellow Marines, his family, and at times even himself. This empathy is coupled with brutal candor, depicting the good days and the bad, and the worst day of all a haunting failure of his own empathy on the battlefield, recounted with a stirring combination of regret and minimal self-pity. If nothing else,

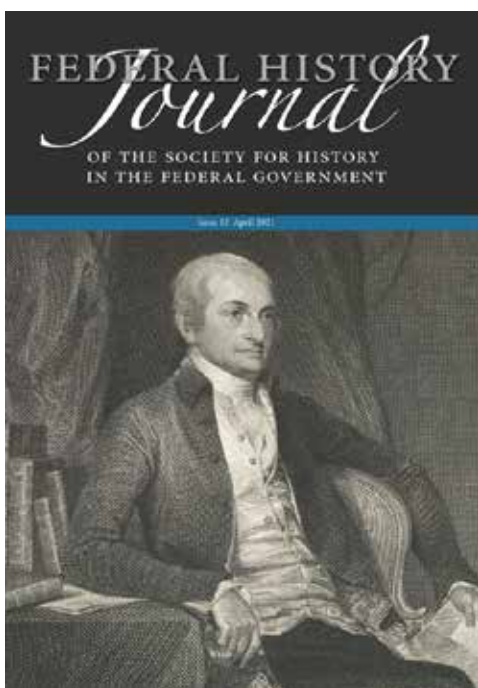
the reader will take from this book a stronger understanding of the moral challenges of modern war and the human costs they impose.

*The Wolves of Helmand* is a worthy reminder that the true cost of war is time taken from people, and that traumas of a continuous war are also continuous, regularly re-inflicted. As the Taliban takes control of the country, veterans like Biggio have just cause to ask whether a negotiated peace might have been achieved sooner. In the silence to which we military professionals are bound, we tally the deaths, injuries, and traumas that might have been avoided. Eminently readable, the book is an achievement and should be mandatory reading for servicemembers, policymakers, and citizens alike.

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## Larry Provost

*Advocating Overlord: The D-Day Strategy and the Atomic Bomb.* By Philip Padgett. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press/Potomac Books, 2018. Pp. 416. \$39.95, cloth; \$26.95, paperback and e-book.)

*Advocating Overlord: The D-Day Strategy and the Atomic Bomb* is a book with an interesting and relatively new argument: that World War II events surrounding the planning of the Normandy invasion and the Manhattan Project, the latter which resulted in the successful detonation and dropping of the atomic bomb, were inextricably linked. While conventional popular opinion remains, accurately so, that the United States and the United Kingdom were close World War II allies that benefited from a special relationship that had its roots even before American entry into the war, the U.S.-UK alliance was not without difficulties to be overcome. Thankfully for the world, the Western Allies successfully met these challenges.

Shortly after formal American entry into World War II in December 1941, the overriding military question was whether grand strategy would emphasize victory first in Europe or in the Pacific. The former was decided on and the immediate question thereafter was how the Allied forces would best be employed on the European continent. The text describes the painstaking logistical process that resulted in American troops going from the United States to the United Kingdom to prepare for D-Day once the Normandy landings were selected instead of a Mediterranean or Balkan operation.

*Advocating Overlord* was not written simply to describe the Normandy landings and what they took to achieve. The book sheds light on the ultimate quid pro quo: that the 1943 decision of the British to support American strategic leadership in Europe was the result of a private assurance from President Franklin

D. Roosevelt to Prime Minister Winston Churchill to share atomic information. Churchill and Roosevelt both grew as a result of their relationship. Churchill came to understand the larger American role in the Anglo-American alliance and acquiesced to Roosevelt's wishes for a cross-channel invasion of Europe as opposed to Churchill's preference to attack the "soft underbelly of Europe."<sup>1</sup> Roosevelt came to understand the need to defend America before entry into World War II while also grasping that Great Britain was, in many ways, the first line of defense for the United States. Their mutual understanding built and solidified the special relationship between the two nations. The Anglo-American alliance that formed the basis for the invasion of Europe has endured for more than 80 years through atomic operation, the Korean War, the Falklands War, the Gulf War, Afghanistan, Iraq, and continuing cooperation through the Five Eyes alliance that includes Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The text devotes more discussion of the Normandy invasion than the atomic bomb. This was not an intentional slight by the author but rather a reflection of the fact that the Normandy operation was more pressing than the Manhattan Project and that the latter was even more secret than Operation Overlord. Such emphasis on the Normandy operation does not take away from the author's thought-provoking and correct thesis. Additionally, *Advocating Overlord* does not deal only with geopolitical issues, such as the nature of the wartime alliance, but also with strategic issues, such as the lack of Allied troops in 1943 to make an overwhelming strike against Nazi Germany.

Larry Provost, chaplain candidate (2dLt), Virginia Army National Guard, also serves as the outreach officer for the National Cemetery Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. He is a student at the Naval War College. Views presented are his own.

<sup>1</sup> Entry 8, "The Soft Underbelly of Europe," *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 522.

The triumph contained in *Advocating Overlord* is, of course, those brave troops who stormed the beaches of Normandy and whose valor cannot be overstated. Yet, there were other triumphs in World War II, such as Roosevelt and Churchill's diplomatic triumph in reestablishing cooperation on grand European strategy. While Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin had a large front to engage Adolf Hitler's Germany, it was fought mostly in a singular direction. The American and British/Commonwealth forces had to decide where their primary engagement in Europe would be: Western Europe or the Mediterranean.

*Advocating Overlord* is a medium-length academic work that can uniquely serve a secondary purpose as

popular history, though the scholarly emphasis of the text is clear throughout. It is meticulously researched, as detailed by frequent citation of books, transcripts, memoranda, and other documents throughout to buttress its claims. The academic nature of the text does not distract from a very engaging and suspenseful read. Military officials, political figures, diplomats, historians, and, to a lesser extent, lay historians, scientists, and other interested parties will find the well-researched text engaging and worthwhile in the study of two momentous events during World War II and the beginnings of the special relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States.

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## Cavender S. Sutton

*Storms over the Mekong: Major Battles of the Vietnam War.* By William P. Head. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2020. Pp. 480. \$40.00, cloth.)

During the last half-century, military historians have pursued and promulgated their work while following two distinct and often parallel paths. The first concerns operational history: detailed analyses of what armed forces did, where they did it, how, and why. The second focuses on the humanistic side of war, asking who served in a given military, why, what happened to them, and how armies impact the societies from which they come and in which they operate.<sup>1</sup> Historiographical trends indicate the latter camp has increased in popularity while the former is often deemed unimportant at best and taboo at worst. In 1975, Dennis E. Showalter predicted and tried to alleviate this polarization, arguing that since armies exist to fight and are judged, both internally and externally, by their military efficiency, the study of how armies fight their enemies can and must retain an important role in military history.<sup>2</sup> William Head's *Storms over the Mekong* provides engaging accounts of the Vietnam War's most important and consequential battles and shows that operational military history is not a lost art within the field. Head presents a rather straightforward narrative of each confrontation while analyzing its effects on the conflict as a whole. Most importantly, he attempts to explain how each engagement drove the war's events forward, influencing

what choices American, South Vietnamese, and Communist military and political leaders would make as the conflict progressed.

Head divides his book into nine chapters, each addressing a specific battle or operation during the conflict. These events include the Army of the Republic of Vietnam's (ARVN) bloody attack on Viet Cong forces at Ap Bac in January 1963, U.S. bombing campaigns during the opening and closing phases of American involvement in the conflict, the 1965 Battle of the Ia Drang, and the fall of Saigon in 1975. Head, who has written on air power before, seems most at home during the two chapters discussing American bombing campaigns. He provides fine discussions about the ways in which airpower was an integral component in the buildup and eventual withdrawal of American forces in South Vietnam. These chapters also detail how air strategy evolved as the conflict progressed and how, despite these alterations, aerial bombing failed to strike the decisive blow sought by U.S. and Republic of Vietnam (RVN) leadership.

Aside from providing engaging narratives of each battle, the book's greatest strength is the manner in which each confrontation is connected to the war's larger progression of events. Head provides some good analyses of how each confrontation's outcome influenced choices made further down the road. He also provides some analytical challenges to several commonly held assumptions about the war, the most provocative of which is an exploration of North Vietnamese general Vo Nguyen Giap's true intentions for launching the 1968 siege of Khe Sanh. Head raises some intriguing challenges to the idea that the North Vietnamese Army assault was merely a distraction from the Tet offensive's broader objectives. In short, Head's book is more than a standard narrative of sig-

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<sup>1</sup> These are elementary synopses. For more detailed explorations, see Wayne E. Lee, "Mind and Matter: Cultural Analysis in American Military History: A Look at the State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 (March 2007): 1116–42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25094598>; and Robert M. Citino, "Military Histories Old and New: A Reintroduction," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (October 2007): 1070–90, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.112.4.1070>.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis E. Showalter, "A Modest Plea for Drums and Trumpets," *Military Affairs* 39, no. 2 (April 1975): 71–72.

nificant battles; it is also a study of interconnected choices. It explores how battlefield events (themselves the products of specific choices) influenced U.S., RVN, and Communist decision-making processes for future diplomatic, political, or military action as the conflict progressed.

At the same time, Head's criteria for what made an engagement appropriate for his study is addressed on multiple occasions, but is inadequately explained. Granted, readers may determine that information for themselves as the book progresses, but a thorough explanation early on would enhance the work. In addition, Head confines some of his analyses within an overly simplistic presentation of American strategic thought, particularly that of U.S. Army general William C. Westmoreland and the idea that U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, strategy was driven solely by the desire to drive up enemy body counts. Recent scholarship has called this notion into question, the most prominent of which has been the work of Gregory A. Daddis who, through three books, has cogently argued that such interpretations of Westmoreland's strategy are far too simplistic.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the book contains several, albeit minor, factual

inaccuracies. For example, Head refers to Company I, 2d Battalion, 26th Marines (p. 119), but later states the same company was in 3d Battalion, 26th Marines (p. 122), the latter being correct because all Marine infantry regiments then and now contain an Company I in their third battalion, not the second. In another example, it is stated that Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller was a general during the 1950 battle at Chosin Reservoir when, in fact, he was then a colonel in command of the 1st Marine Regiment (p. 127).

Minor discrepancies aside, *Storms over the Mekong* provides engaging discussions of several pivotal moments in the Vietnam War. The book does not introduce any new or groundbreaking analyses, but Head does a competent job of explaining how each campaign or engagement influenced decision makers on both sides of the 17th parallel. These analytical conclusions can be a bit simplistic at times (the sections discussing the Ia Drang battle's aftermath is a glaring example), but Head's book can serve as a useful text for casual readers or young scholars who seek a foundational understanding of how the Vietnam War unfolded at the operational level.

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<sup>3</sup>For the best example, see Gregory A. Daddis, *Westmoreland's War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 65–91.

## William A. Taylor, PhD

*Warring over Valor: How Race and Gender Shaped American Military Heroism in the 20th and 21st Centuries.* Edited by Simon Wendt. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018. Pp. 220. \$125.00, cloth; \$30.95, paperback and e-book.)

In *Warring over Valor*, Simon Wendt has assembled an array of distinguished contributors from prestigious U.S. and international institutions representing a diverse range of fields and spanning American studies, history, and political science. They examine military heroism in the United States—historically centered around White masculine warrior heroes—during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and ranging generally from World War I to the present. The authors explore military heroism as a cultural construct: it was created, dynamic, and contested. The result is an exquisite collection that reveals the complicated ways that race, gender, nationalism, and the mutable nature of warfare all have challenged this conventional notion of the White masculine warrior. The authors do so through the prism of American military heroism and the ways that it has reinforced stereotypes and hierarchies. They also share cogent insights regarding how military service, especially valor on the battlefield, has influenced broader American society. Students, scholars, and general readers interested in military heroism and its varied intersections with race, gender, sexuality, and civil rights will benefit from reading it.

The purpose of this volume is to interrogate how military heroism has been used in U.S. history, the results, and why it matters. Wendt explains, “More spe-

cifically, this book examines how minorities such as African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, women, and gay men were affected by America’s military heroism discourse, and how they used that discourse in their quest for full membership in the nation” (p. 2). In doing so, the authors expose a central irony: military heroism both has contested and has buttressed the status quo with regard to race, gender, and sexuality. Ultimately, however, the authors demonstrate that military heroism primarily maintained the existing state of affairs by defining who could participate, who could benefit, and on what terms, thereby bolstering entrenched hierarchies, even when it allowed previously marginalized groups some entrée into broader citizenship.

This collection presents a medley of case studies that each investigate military heroism in a distinct way. Each essay is wholly fascinating and cogently argued. As a group, they uncover the vast complexity of military heroism and the myriad manners in which it was shaped, contested, and fought over, as well as the distinct conceptions of it that various groups had, countering monolithic formulations. The authors leverage a solid foundation of sources to build their arguments, including archival material, government documents, personal letters, political speeches, popular magazines, and contemporary newspapers. As an added bonus, they seamlessly integrate their essays into the broader literature, providing readers a useful overview of each topic and overarching themes of past research and possible directions for future inquiries.

Wendt opens the book with an alluring introduction on military heroism in American history—illustrated most visibly with the advent of the Medal of Honor in 1862—that orients readers to what will

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follow. Ten perceptive chapters ensue, each one examining a specific aspect of this weighty topic and together covering military heroism through such diverse perspectives as the American Legion, Japanese Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, wartime atrocities, gay soldiers, war photography, female soldiers, Lakota veterans, and virtual depictions of heroism in video games. Each essay holds great merit and is a fascinating read on its own; in concert, they make a substantial addition to an understanding of military heroism, the ways it is constructed, the complexities it represents, and the challenges and opportunities of redefining it at critical junctures in American history.

*Warring over Valor* is a significant contribution to an informed comprehension of how views of military heroism have changed over time, why they have morphed, and the many implications of such transformation, demonstrating how military heroism went through nationalization, democratization, and iconization in turn. This perceptive volume bares a number of important contrasts: inclusion/exclusion, valor/service, combat/noncombat, objective/subjective, civic nationalism/ethnic nationalism, and change/status quo, among others. Ultimately, the pioneering, thorough, and lucid essays in this excellent volume highlight the most important dichotomy regarding military heroism: that this powerful social, political, and cultural construct that, historically, privileged White males simultaneously reinforced racial and gender stereotypes and offered opportunities for minorities and marginalized groups to redefine its meaning and leverage it toward greater inclusion and civil rights in broader American society. This work is highly recommended to anyone seeking a nuanced grasp of the complicated milieu of military heroism, marginalized groups, and the vital intersections between them.

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## David J. Ulbrich, PhD

*The Emergence of American Amphibious Warfare, 1898–1945.* By David S. Nasca. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2020. Pp. 360. \$40.00, cloth.)

David S. Nasca sets ambitious goals for his book titled *The Emergence of American Amphibious Warfare, 1898–1945*.<sup>1</sup> He traces how and why “the modernization of amphibious warfare positioned the United States to become the most powerful nation in the world and, ultimately, established the foundations of an international system shaped under American leadership” (p. 6). Later in his introduction, Nasca posits that “while military technology transformed the conduct of war, its application to amphibious warfare changed the balance of power in the international system. . . . By creating a new world order in the aftermath of World War II, the United States became the indispensable power on earth” (p. 9). He writes in a narrative style punctuated by analyses or commentary by historical actors or scholars.

A brief introduction reaches back to antiquity to find the roots of amphibious warfare before turning to modern theories about technology and strategy. Nasca then divides his book into four substantive chapters that flow chronologically from 1898 to 1945. His wide-ranging conclusion provides a summary of chapters and takes the reader through the Cold War into the twenty-first century.

The chapter on the Spanish-American War explains how that conflict helped the United States become a global power. Nasca makes the salient points that amphibious operations not only played roles in fighting on Cuba and in the Philippines but also remained significant components supporting American

strategic plans in the Caribbean and Pacific thereafter. He also provides commentary on amphibious operations and technology in the American Civil War (1861–65) and the War of the Pacific (1879–83) as precursors to the Spanish-American War (1898).

Nasca then turns to the years 1900–18 in his second chapter. The Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), Philippine Insurrection (1899–1902), and ongoing American occupations in Latin America become case studies in how the U.S. military used amphibious operations to exercise its newfound great power status. Nasca highlights the amphibious campaigns of Gallipoli, Cameroon, German Southwest Africa, and German East Africa in 1915, as well as in the Baltic in 1917 as examples of failures or successes in doctrine, planning, and execution. The cautionary tale of Gallipoli, in particular, provided a wealth of lessons to be learned in the postwar years.

The next chapter focuses on the pivotal interwar years that saw the United States and other nations grapple with formulating doctrines and procuring landing craft to make successful assaults on enemy beaches possible. Nasca details the political and diplomatic backdrops for the evolution of amphibious warfare in the 1920s and 1930s. These elements influenced the American participation in the Washington Naval Conference, the evolution of the Orange War Plans, and the transition into the Rainbow Plans. As seen in Nasca’s observations and his evidence, the U.S. Marine Corps also solidified its proponentcy in innovating amphibious capabilities in anticipation of potential hostilities in the Pacific.

Nasca’s final substantive chapter examines the Second World War. He presents balanced narratives of German amphibious operations in Norway and Crete and of Japanese assaults on Wake, Hong Kong,

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<sup>1</sup> This book is an outgrowth of David S. Nasca, “The Influence of Technology in Amphibious Warfare and Its Impact on U.S. Geopolitical Strategy from 1898 to 1945” (PhD diss., Salve Regina University, 2017).

the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands. These Axis successes occurred early in the conflict before the Allies launched their own amphibious operations in their grinding counteroffensive strategy. These assaults started with Guadalcanal in the Southwest Pacific and Operation Torch in North Africa in 1942, evolved over time, and culminated in Operation Overlord in France in 1944 and Operation Iceberg at Okinawa in 1945. Nasca makes the direct connection between the doctrines laid down by the Marine Corps in *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations* in 1934 and the successful amphibious campaigns in the Pacific theater in the Second World War.

Nasca's book contains several major shortcomings in research, analysis, and tone that mar his arguments and conclusions. Although no single volume can be expected to include all relevant documentation, readers have reasonable expectations for the seminal historical studies and key archival sources to be consulted. Those references become road maps for future inquiries. Nasca's notes and bibliography contain several significant reports and manuals; however, he gives no citations to key Marine Corps, Navy, or Army manuals dealing with amphibious warfare, nor are references made to the evolving strategic war plans between 1898 and 1945.<sup>2</sup> Among the books absent from Nasca's citations are *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War* by Jeter A. Isely and Philip A. Crowl, *Utmost Savagery* by Joseph H. Alexander, *Guadalcanal* by Rich-

ard B. Frank, and *Omaha Beach* by Adrian R. Lewis.<sup>3</sup> Technological innovation stands as a central theme in Nasca's book, but several scholarly studies in the history of military technology are also missing.<sup>4</sup> Terms like *strategy*, *operations*, and *warfare* are coupled with *amphibious* throughout the book, but Nasca makes no careful dissections regarding what these word combinations mean in various contexts.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, fewer than 40 books, articles, and online sources in the entire 22-page bibliography were published more recently than

<sup>2</sup> Jeter A. Isely and Philip A. Crowl, *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War: Its Theory and Its Practice in the Pacific* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951); Joseph H. Alexander, *Utmost Savagery: The Three Days of Tarawa* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995); Richard B. Frank, *Guadalcanal: The Definitive Account of the Landmark Battle* (New York: Random House, 1990); and Adrian R. Lewis, *Omaha Beach: Flawed Victory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Two essays could also have added nuance about logistics and Japanese amphibious capabilities: James C. Bradford, "The Missing Link: Expeditionary Logistics," *Naval History* 20, no. 1 (February 2006): 54–61; and the chapter "The Development of Imperial Japanese Army Amphibious Warfare Doctrine," in Edward J. Drea, *In the Service of the Emperor: Essays on the Imperial Japanese Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 14–25. Many more germane studies do not appear in Nasca's bibliography: Jack Shulimson, *The Marine Corps' Search for a Mission, 1880–1898* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993); Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897–1945* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1991); Edward Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army: Its Rise and Fall* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009); David C. Evans and Mark R. Peattie, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1887–1941* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997); Michael R. Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy: American Operational Art to 1945* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011); Jerry E. Strahan, *Andrew Jackson Higgins and the Boats that Won World War II* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); Robert S. Burrell, *The Ghosts of Iwo Jima* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006); Henry G. Gole, *The Road to Rainbow: Army Planning for Global War, 1934–1940* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2002); and Allan R. Millett and Jack Shulimson, eds., *Commandants of the Marine Corps* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> In his discussion of technological innovation as a process, Nasca cites Stephen Peter Rosen, "New Ways of War: Understanding Military Innovation," *International Security* 13, no. 1 (Summer 1988): 134–68; and Stephen S. Cohen and John Zysman, "Manufacturing Innovation and American Industrial Competitiveness," *Science*, New Series 239, no. 4844 (4 March 1988): 1110–15, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.239.4844.1110>. However, Nasca offers no deeper discussion drawn from sources like Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Alex Roland, "Science, War, and Technology," *Technology and Culture* 36, no. 2 (April 1995): 8–100; Barton C. Hacker, "The Machines of War: Western Technology, 1850–1900," *History and Technology* 21, no. 1 (September 2005): 255–300; or Timothy Moy, *War Machines: Transforming Technologies in the U.S. Military, 1920–1940* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> For a matrix of detailed explanations amphibious warfare at the tactical, operational, strategic, and grand strategic levels, see the introductory and concluding essays in D. J. B. Trim and Mark Charles Fissel, eds., *Amphibious Warfare: 1000–1700* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> For a large sampling of manuals including the U.S. Navy, see "Amphibious Warfare: Home," Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library Digital Library. See also *Landing Operations Doctrine*, Fleet Training Publications 167 (1938); *Landing Operations on Hostile Shores*, U.S. Army Field Manual 31-5 (1941); U.S. Marine Corps Schools, *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations* (1934); and U.S. Marine Corps Schools, *Tentative Manual for the Defense of Advanced Bases* (1936). For a published anthology of American war plans, see Steven T. Ross, ed., *Plans to Meet Axis Threat*, vol. 3, *American War Plans, 1919–1941* (New York: Garland, 1992). In addition, invaluable but missing insights could have drawn from vast oral history collections at the Marine Corps University, the Army Heritage and Education Center, and the Naval History and Heritage Command.



2010.<sup>6</sup> While it may seem excessive to list so many references in the footnotes of this review, the dearth of critical studies points to holes in research and voids in historiography. Without integrating these studies, Nasca's premises are therefore not as developed, and his conclusions are not as rich as they might otherwise have been.

These gaps in research in Nasca's book contribute to his faulty analysis. In ongoing efforts to highlight the amphibious warfare's connections with technological innovations and military strategy, he conflates the three categories and overplays his point. Yes, he correctly observes that the U.S. military, including the Marines, employed amphibious capabilities to achieve strategic goals. However, Nasca does not explore how and why these capabilities rested at the lower operational and tactical levels of war as means, albeit critical, to achieve those higher-level strategic goals. For example, Edward S. Miller's book *War Plan Orange* contrasts the Navy's "thruster" admirals (who favored a fast-moving offensive campaign across the Pacific against opposing Japanese naval forces) with the "cautionary" admirals (who believed a slower, more deliberate campaign could defeat the Japanese). However, because Nasca does not cite Miller's work, he misses the opportunity to demonstrate how and why amphibious operational capabilities—both offensive and defensive—fit so intricately into American strategic plans.<sup>7</sup>

Nasca correctly argues that the Marine Corps' development of amphibious doctrine, landing craft, and force structure related to technological development. Even so, the emergence of practical landing

craft in the late 1930s, for instance, could be better described as the Marines' adaptation or improvisation of existing civilian and Japanese designs, rather than the innovation of new vehicles. The relationship among technology, doctrine, and mission followed a progression: the Marines needed to fulfill an amphibious assault mission, so they needed to create the proper force structures, doctrines, and vehicles. That mission drove the process. On the contrary, aircraft and tanks constituted innovative weapons systems and vehicles that required contentious debates in the Army and Navy to identify the best missions, force structures, and doctrines for them. These contrasting case studies also point to the Marine Corps' distinctive organizational culture as a critical component in the maturation process of amphibious doctrines, force structures, and vehicles from 1898 to 1945.<sup>8</sup> Nasca neither contextualizes nor disentangles technological innovation or adaptation.

Apart from conceptual problems and missing scholarly perspectives, Nasca writes in a triumphalist tone. According to his introduction, "This power enabled the United States to establish the foundations of a new international system that was shaped by American political, social, and economic values" (p. 9). He next tries to make amphibious warfare an essential factor in the nation's post-World War II hegemony by stating, "Therefore, America's continued use of amphibious capabilities, as well as other power projection abilities, would not only shield the Western Hemisphere from outside powers, but also serve as tools for maintaining international peace" (p. 9). Nasca asserts that these same principles extended into the twenty-first century. Meanwhile, he cites a wide range of authors like Alfred Thayer Mah-

<sup>6</sup> Recent studies are missing, including Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution of Military Affairs in Russia, the US, and Israel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); David J. Ulbich, *Preparing for Victory: Thomas Holcomb and the Making of the Modern Marine Corps, 1936–1941* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011); and Sam J. Trangedi, *Anti-Access Warfare: Countering A2/AD Strategies* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Miller, *War Plan Orange*, 36, 77–84, 262–87, 329–53. For other studies untapped by Nasca, see D. Clayton James, "American and Japanese Strategies in the Pacific War," in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 702–32; and Alexander Kiralfy, "Japanese Naval Strategy," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, ed. Edward Mead Earle (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1943), 457–84.

<sup>8</sup> Nasca rightly cites Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, eds., *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). However, Nasca did not consult other relevant studies of this time period: William F. Trimble, *Admiral William A. Moffett: Architect of Naval Aviation* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993); David E. Johnson, *Fast Tanks and Heavy Bombers: Innovation in the U.S. Army, 1917–1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); David J. Ulbrich, "The U.S. Marine Corps, Amphibious Capabilities, and Preparations for War with Japan," *Marine Corps University Journal* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 21–38; Matthew S. Muehlbauer and David J. Ulbrich, *Ways of War: American Military History from the Colonial Era to the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 314–45; and Moy, *War Machines*.

an, Henry Kissinger, Max Boot, Victor Davis Hanson, John J. Mearsheimer, Andrew J. Bacevich, and Howard Zinn, but he makes no concerted effort to filter their ideologies or situate them in their respective historical contexts. This creates confusion for anyone seeking nuanced interpretations. Finally, the conclusion to Nasca's book states that "it was because of the influence of technology on amphibious warfare that the United States' victory in World War II brought

the American republic to superpower status" and that the United States "rose to become a superpower that would champion capitalism, a free market economy, and liberal democracy throughout the world" (p. 248). With these quotes as bookends and without any criticism of sources, Nasca's applications of the past's lessons to the present and future are problematic at best.

In closing, Nasca's arguments need to be leavened with other scholarly studies.

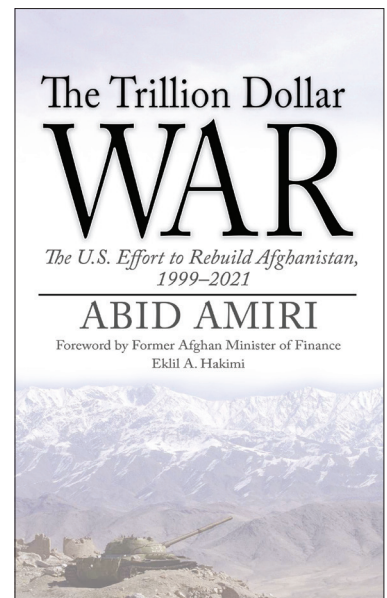
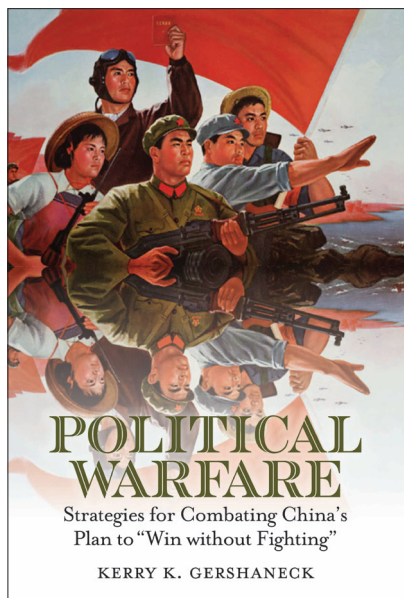
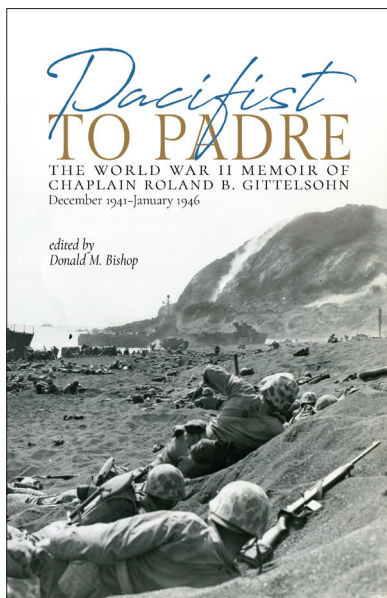
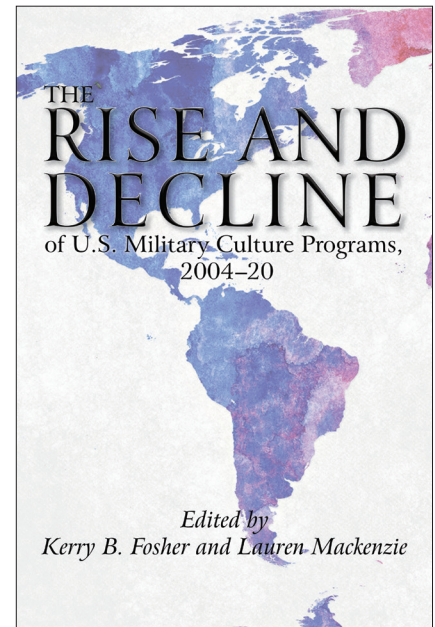
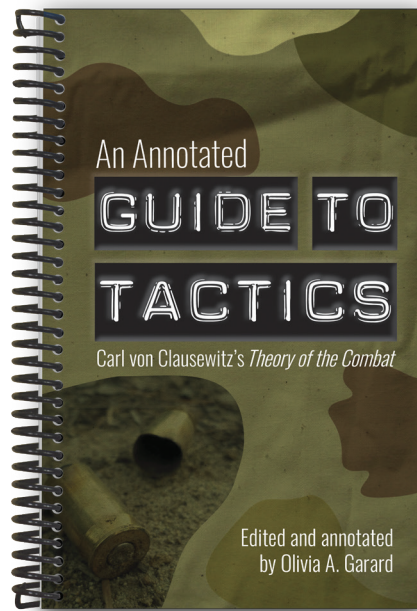
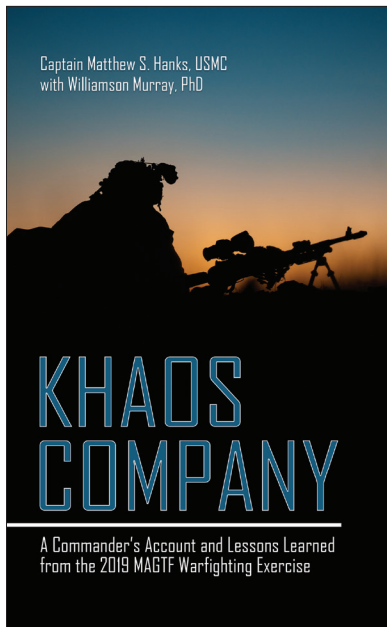
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