A Concise History of the Marine Corps in the War of 1812 Era

By: Colin Murphy

Preface

What follows is a basic and somewhat incomplete accounting of the United States Marine Corps during the years 1812-1815 which encompassed the War of 1812 and other military actions. Incomplete in that does cover all the major events of those years but does not do justice to the complete story of the men of the Marine Corps of that time. That enterprise is underway.

This accounting does not come with a bibliography or notes. That will surely be attached to a larger work. However, the information contained within comes from, perhaps, thousands of hours or researching and reading the documents produced by the United State Marine Corps, the United States Navy and the United States Army prior to, during and after the War of 1812. Most of these are located at the National Archives in Washington D.C. while some came from other repositories. Others are contained in primary source anthologies produce by government agencies or private historical associations. More can be located in the newspapers of the era that are located on a number of online databases.

Aside from primary sources I have relied on a large number of secondary sources. Numerous peer reviewed articles in academic and professional journals and dozens of books published on the relevant topics. At the end there is a "suggested reading" list that contains a fraction of the books.

For any reader that wishes for a more specific attribution of any information please contact me and I will happily pass it along.

Contents:

Introduction

The War of 1812 was a small war in the era of the European conflagration often categorized at the Napoleonic Wars. Most battles of the War of 1812 were fought by hundreds, to maybe a few thousand men (there are some exceptions) while battles in Europe had hundreds of thousands of men. Yet, the war in North America was spread out over half of a continent and all the oceans of the world and the United States Marines fought in all of the various theatres. To make this concise history less complicated to follow it is presented by "theaters of operation" and by year.

The theaters include the **Northern Theater**, along the entirety of the settled border between the United States (Maine to Michigan) and Upper and Lower Canada including actions on Great Lakes. **The Chesapeake Bay Theater** sections covers events on land and on the water in that reagion. The **Southern Theater** from coastal Georgia and Florida to environs of New Orleans in Louisiana. The **Ocean Theater** covers naval actions on the oceans and seas of the world.

Other Military Events Involving Marines: 1812-1815

The war with Britain was obviously the main conflict of the era, but it was not the only event that saw the Marines go into action. The largest of these peripheral events was due to the mentioned American desire to control the entirety of North America.

<u>The Patriot's War:</u>

The border of Georgia and Florida was an area of contest. Florida as we know it today was known as East Florida in this period and it was controlled by Spain and was also a base to some of the most hostile tribes of Native Americans; the Seminole and Creeks. Also the dense swampland and forests provided an ideal location for runaway slaves from American southern plantations. In 1811 an expansionist group of Americans, who had considered the possibility since the late 1790s, saw East Florida as an opportunity for a land grab. The Spanish were too weak to defend their territory and the raids against Georgia by the hostile tribes made control of East Florida desirable to many Georgians. In the larger body of the history to follow the events of the Patriots War are placed in the Southern Theatre.

Marquesas Islands Intervention:

As a part of the war against Britain, the USS *Essex* set sail in 1812 on a mission that was supposed to link her up with other American ships in the Atlantic. When she was unable to rendezvous with her companions Captain David Porter decided to take the war to the Pacific Ocean. This cruise would be one of the most audacious and impressive in the history of the United States Navy. During this cruise the USS *Essex* would find herself refitting in the Marquesas Islands in South Pacific While ashore the Americans soon found themselves unwittingly involved in a local war. Lt. John Gamble would lead his Marine guard into the dense mountain jungles and onto the beaches in an effort to pacify enemies and stabilize the islands so needed by the crews for refitting and re-supply. The events of this episode are covered in the Ocean Theatre, 1813 section.

Louisiana Anti-Piracy Campaign:

Even during times of war Marines have often been called upon to act on their nation's behalf in other ways. In the third year of the War of 1812 the gulf coast was becoming a theater of focus, but it also remained an area saturated with privateers and smugglers that often received the title of "pirates." Among these pirates were the infamous Lafitte Brothers. Jean and Jacques Lafitte ran a cartel of pirates that sailed under the flag of Cartagena (modern day Colombia). They raided shipping in the Gulf of Mexico regardless of their country of origin. They would take their booty to a base on the Island of Grand Terre in the bayous of Louisiana known then as Baritaria. From Baritaria the Lafitte's and their men ran a thriving business selling their pilfered goods to the high society of New Orleans. In 1814 the U. S. Government could no longer stand by while this activity flourished. When it came time to act Major Daniel Carmick and his 160 plus man command would play an important role in the government's effort to eradicate the pirates in that region. The events related to this are presented in the Southern Theatre 1814-15 section.

The Marine Corps at the Outbreak of War

The organization of the Marine Corps in 1812, like today, was commanded by the Commandant of the Marine Corps. In this period the Commandant was to have the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and also like today was stationed in Marine Barracks, Washington and under the direct command of the Secretary of the Navy. Public law allowed the Commandant to have a staff that consisted of an adjutant, a Paymaster and a Quartermaster. These were usually captains or senior lieutenants stationed in Washington. There was also a Quartermaster Sergeant, a Fife Major and Drum Major to lead the, even then famous and much utilized, Marine Corps Band.

When war was declared on June 18, 1812 the Marine Corps was significantly undermanned. Public law called for nearly 2,000 Marines. A complete accounting sent to the Secretary of the Navy in September of 1812 would show that there were roughly 1,200 Marines on the muster rolls of the various stations and ships. It is probable that about that many were active in June of that year. The stations consisted of the major navy yards at Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Norfolk and New Orleans. There were secondary stations at Baltimore and Charleston S. C. as well as a Sergeant's guard of twelve men on board the US Brig Oneida on Lake Ontario. There was also a company sized detachment of Marines stationed on Cumberland Island of the southern coast of Georgia. Marines were also on board the sixteen sea going ships of the United States Navy, her various gunboat flotillas and had a small presence on Lake Ontario.

The gunboats were one or two gun vessels that were cramped, often un-seaworthy and usually stationed in harbors for coastal protection. These would carry a corporal and three privates. The active ships ranged from twelve-gun sloops of war to the forty-four gun frigates. The size of the guards on board the ships ranged from eight to twelve men on the sloops of war to as many as sixty men on board the large frigates, but due to lack of manpower the guards were often under strength. To remedy this, in the months leading up to the war, the Secretary of the Navy had the Marines serving on board the gunboat squadrons in the port cities removed to fill out the larger vessels' guards.

The Marine Corps, at this time, was at a serious disadvantage when it came to recruitment. The U.S. Army offered recruits eight dollars a month, a land grant of 180 acres and terms of enlistment of three, two or even one year. On top of this, when the war began, the

Army was authorized to give enlistment bonuses and advanced pay. The Marine Corps was only allowed to offer five year terms of enlistment, six dollars a month and no land grant (see pay scale below). To counter the land grant the Navy Department stressed the opportunity of prize money from capturing ships. However, this was not automatic like land grants. Marines were not guaranteed service aboard a vessel and if they did get aboard a vessel the hazards of taking an enemy ship, or even the inherent dangers of sea going life made the prospect far less appealing.

Acknowledging the disadvantage, the Marine Corps faced at the beginning of the war a law was passed that allowed recruits to receive a twenty dollar advance in pay: ten upon enlistment and ten once they were mustered at a station or aboard a ship. Of course this was only a pay advance so it was not an "extra" incentive to join. So without any enticements it was little surprise the Marine Corps continuously struggled to fill its rolls.

Pay Scale for the United States Marine Corps during 1812 Era

Rank	Dollars per Month
Private	6
Music	7
Corporal	8
Sergeant	9
Drum and Fife Major	9
Sgt. Major; QM Sgt	10
2nd Lieutenant	25
1st Lieutenant	30
Captain	40
Major	50
Lt. Colonel	65

Officers on the staff of the Commandant were allowed $20 more a month.
Recruiting officers were also given a $4 stipend for every man enlisted.

Recruits and Recruiting

The Commandant set the qualifications of the recruits. Records show that the commandant sent varying requirements throughout the war which, of course, got less and less stringent as the needs grew. Taking the extremes of his requirements in the years 1812-1815 the range in height was 5'2" to 6'4". The age range was eighteen to forty-five years old. The recruits had to pass a surgeon's exam that checked to see if a man was capable of "performing the duties of a soldier" and that he did not have any communicable diseases or conditions. The recruit was also required to be of sound mind and have a working knowledge of the English.

Of course those requirements were the ideal which the Commandant wanted but that was not always what he received. Correspondences show that some recruits were well into their fifties and some their sixties; many were often suffering from rheumatism. Others had to be dismissed because of "idiotism", insanity or because they could not understand the language. Records also show that men often had to be dismissed because of "old age." Two of the most extreme cases came were those of "old Branigan" and "old Mahoney". Both these men were of advanced age. "Old Branigan" who was called "a soldier of '76" was taken out of the ranks by Capt. Williams in Florida and put on board a gunboat because Williams believed any other duty would kill the man. "Old Mahoney's" term of enlistment had expired in Boston in late 1812 yet his commanding officer dare not let him leave as he believed the "old fella" would never make it home alive. Yet, despite these extreme stories and the many other stories of men suffering from ailments consistent with advanced age, the average age of a Marine was twenty-six years old from lower middle to lower class backgrounds. Enlistment papers show occupations such as planter, laborer, cobbler, tailor and, often, soldier. Most Marines appear to be native born but many of them were immigrants; many Irish, but also Scottish, English, German and Spanish as well. There were also Italians that were a core group of the Marine Corps band. They had been recruited, with their families, in 1804 by Captain John Hall while on duty in the Mediterranean. Some returned to Italy in 1807, but many remained in the Marine Corps and the United States the rest of their lives.

The Marine recruit would receive his training at the barracks or on board the ship near where he was recruited and first assigned. It was also a practice to have all men from ships guards, when the ship was in port, to land in and train with the local Marines of the station at

which they landed. They would learn to stand, march, load and fire correctly as well as the duties discipline and customs they would need to perform.

The officers of the Marine Corps, like the Commandant himself, were men from respected, wealthy families that could use their political influence to obtain a commission for their sons. There is a question about why a young man of the period would choose the Marine Corps as opposed to the Army or Navy since the prospect of advancement in rank and pay was minimal in comparison seeing that the highest ranking officer was a Lieutenant Colonel. Also, the Marine Corps was not regarded too highly by the public or even the government officials. So it is a mystery why young men from such influential families choose the Corps. It may be the fact that the Marines gave them an opportunity to see the world as opposed to being in the Army and seeing the outposts of American civilization in the woods and fields of young nation's frontier borders.

Once in the officer corps of the Marine Corps it seems that these men became very close and cordial. They were a small band that, due to the nature of the service, interacted with a great proportion of the entire number. This friendliness is often found in their official letters to one another that, unlike most professional correspondence of the time, ended with testimonials of affection, comedic statements and concerns and wishes for each others' family and friends. The officers, once accepting their commission would be ordered to report to Marine Barracks Washington for their training.

Drill of the recruits

There is no extant evidence of the Marines final choice of drill for their men on board ship or ashore. However, within Marine Corps documents at the National Archives is order issued by Lt. Col. Commandant Franklin Wharton on August 31, 1805 stating the basics the new recruits must learn as soon as possible. The letter is here transcribed:

Ordered That Recruits in future be taught the following Principles of Military Movements previously to their receiving Arms & Accoutrements. Viz.

Position of a Soldier in Line
Dressing to the Right & to the Left
The various Facings
Standing at Ease & from Ease to Attention
As files singly to march forward or obliquely
To change the Step at the Word
To advance from the right by files
To form Sections by files marching

The different facings by the right & left Turns
Breaking off of Sections and again forming them
Forming of sections from line by files
Forming a single file from a double in marching
*The wheeling backwards from * [Line on the right or left] & forward into line*
The side step to the right or left
To Countermarch to the right or left
Right and Left shoulder forward
To Mark time. To March quick or slow time
To Halt! at the word of Command
Also
The Salute of the Hand to an Officer having previously faced & fronted to him in passing [see below]

Washington Aug^{t} 31st, 1805 *F. Wharton*
L^{t} C. C. M. Corps

Saluting

About the same time Col. Wharton issued an order regarding the saluting regulations of Marines. Marines were to never remove their caps in salute. They were to face the officer and for officers with two epaulettes, Major and above, Marines were to present arms. For officers below a Major, Marines were to bring their right hand to their brim with the palm out.

Supply and Demand

The "military industrial complex" in 1812 was centered around Philadelphia. Philadelphia was close to the center of the United States' population and a central location in regards to the American military in the early years of the republic. For these reasons the Government sought out contractors for clothing and supplies in the Philadelphia region more than any other major population center. This being the case, the Marine Barracks in Philadelphia became the supply depot of the Marine Corps and the commander of the barracks, Major Anthony Gale, working with the Quartermaster and Commandant in Washington, became the primary distributor of clothing and equipment for the Marine Corps during this era. By and large this would remain true for the entire war but as the numbers of Marines grew and the British blockade of the US coast tightened it became necessary for equipment and uniforms to be purchased and made in other cities and this led to some instances of uniform and equipment differences amongst the Marines. The greatest challenge of the supply system was transporting

gear to the more remote stations that had no or little supporting industry such as Sackett's Harbour, Put-in-Bay on Lake Erie and, most difficult of all due to the British blockade, New Orleans. There are many officers' letters that state that, even though it is the middle of January, they are still awaiting winter clothing. Ship guards also had a tough time keeping the men supplied. The sporadic and usually unannounced arrival into ports often found that the nearest Marine Barracks lacked the uniforms and equipment for the barracks guard never mind that needed by arriving ships. The worst case of this was on board the USS *Enterprise* upon its arrival in Portsmouth NH in Mid-1813. The sergeant in command of the guard's letter to Commandant Wharton stated that the Marines were owed **TWO** years worth of clothing and more than a years' worth of pay.

Even though there were difficulties the overall performance of the supply system of the Marine Corps was pretty well run under the given circumstances. The Commandant, the Quartermasters, the Quartermaster Sergeant and Major Anthony Gale performed admirably and with the best intentions and concern for the Marines themselves.

Military Operations by Theater

1812: Northern Theater

The only Marines along the Canadian border at the start of the conflict were a Sergeant's Guard aboard the USS *Oneida* consisting of twelve men. Prior to the war the eighteen gun *Oneida* cruised Lake Ontario in an effort to stop smuggling and violations of any of the economic measures put in place by the government. Upon hearing of the declaration of war the *Oneida* set sail and captured two merchant schooners before the word had spread to the Canadian side, but once the news did reach the other shore the *Oneida* became overmatched. The Provincial Marine, a small militia like navy operated by the British government upon the lake, had a small squadron of six ships. The largest ship, the Royal George, mounted twenty-two guns and the other five vessels mounted a total of fifty-six guns.

In early July the Provincial Marine set sail to take the lonely US ship. Smartly the commander of the *Oneida*, Melancton Woolsey, sailed his ship into Black River Bay off the town of Sackett's Harbour, New York. On the small rise above the harbor stood a modest earthwork fort named Fort Tompkins. On July 19, as the enemy approached, the *Oneida* was anchored with one broadside facing the approaching enemy while the rest of the ship's guns

were landed and mounted in the fort. The Marines also went ashore to help man the guns in the fort. The enemy's attack was less than effective and demonstrated the "militia aspect" of their service and they were forced to withdraw due to the accurate and rapid serving of the guns from the *Oneida* and from the fort.

Though the defense was successful it was obvious that the British had superiority on Lake Ontario. The American strategy to conquer Canada called for control of the Great Lakes and by the time of the attack in July, preparations were underway to accomplish ascendancy upon the lakes. In early September Captain Isaac Chauncey was ordered to Sackett's Harbour to establish the American's main base of operations upon the Great Lakes. He emptied the New York Navy Yard and all the ships and gunboats deemed unfit or in ordinary of their crews and also emptied the yard of carpenters, sail makers, laborers and all the other people needed to build his fleet in the wilderness. All Marines from Philadelphia and New York not needed for essential duties in those places, one hundred in all, were placed under command of Captain John Smith and sent north. They traveled up the Hudson River on steamboats until they reached Greenbush opposite of Albany and then proceeded over land to Sackett's Harbour. Upon reaching their destination the Marines began to build their barracks while the workers built ships and the Navy bought privately owned ships to augment the *Oneida* and the one under construction.

The tables were now turned on the Provincial Marine. When the American fleet appeared in force the British ships sought shelter in their most fortified port which would become the British answer to Sackett's Harbour. The U.S. force proceeded into the harbor to challenge the other ships and that Kingston's fortifications. A fierce exchange of cannon fire ensued that lasted about 4 hours. At long ranges Marines could be of no use with their firearms so they stood at their posts exposed to the extreme hazards of a battle with a sense of dissatisfaction because of their inability to take a greater role. After causing extensive damage the US forces withdrew as an attempt to push further into the harbor would probably have cost them dearly. Leaving a couple of ships to blockade the entrance to the harbor the rest of the US fleet did a quick cruise capturing three more British vessels on November 10 and then headed into port before the full onset of the cold season. During the winter Sackett's Harbour, the water and surrounding area, were a frozen block of ice.

Throughout the war the American forces stationed at Sackett's Harbour would suffer the

most difficult winters. Because of the quick cruise at such a late time of the year the Marines were unable to finish their barracks in time so Commodore Chauncey allowed them to stay in a Navy storehouse until it was completed. Even when the barracks was completed later in that winter the warmth of a barracks eluded many of them Marines as most were often required to live on their assigned ships due to rumors of the real possibility of a British force marching across the frozen lake for a surprise attack. The cold and disease brought on by living in cramped quarters over the remainder of the war would be the only killer of Marines upon Lake Ontario and that toll was dreadful.

1812: Chesapeake Theater

From the declaration of war through the end of 1812 the Chesapeake theater was free of major enemy activity and overall quiet. The Marines in Baltimore, Washington and Norfolk drilled, performed their daily duties and supplied men and material for ships in need of Marines. This situation would change drastically in early 1813.

1812: Southern Theater

The War of 1812 as understood in the history books, in the Southern Theater, would not come to this region for nearly two years, but related events would occur even before the declaration of war with Britain on June 18. The Marines in this theater consisted of roughly thirty men stationed in Hampstead S.C. just outside of Charleston, a company sized detachment on the southern tip of Cumberland Island, off the coast of Georgia and one hundred sixty or so men under Major Daniel Carmick in New Orleans. New Orleans would remain the largest post in the Marine Corps until mid-1814 when the number of Marines in Sackett's Harbour reached two hundred fifty plus men.

The greatest threat to New Orleans in 1812 was a destructive hurricane that hit in August and the Marines were not spared. Three Marines were killed when the bomb ketch they were on was swamped by the storm and the Marine quarters had its roof completely removed by the wind. Much of the rest of the year the Marines spent repairing their housing and performing their required duties.

In Charleston the Marines were also not involved in any actions against the enemy, but they were often put on board the gunboats that they had been taken off earlier in the year. The

gunboats cruised the South Carolina coast seeking smugglers coming from the Caribbean.

The most intense action for the Marine Corps in 1812 upon land was to be in an area that had but little to do with the war with Britain. Since May of 1811 a company size detachment (roughly 60) Marines under Captain John Williams on Cumberland Island were acting in cooperation with the small squadron of Navy gunboats in the region combating smuggling and maintaining a military presence on the extreme southern border of the nation. But the "Patriots" of Georgia were about to undertake their semi-officially sponsored and condoned conquest of Spanish East Florida. Though not too sure of the involvement they were supposed to have, the Marines and sailors hesitantly agreed to assist the Patriots. On March 18, three months before the declaration of war, the American forces crossed the St. Mary's River and captured Fernandina Island from a small Spanish garrison. The Marines remained at Fernandina for most of the summer. Captain Williams became the de-facto American governor of the captured territory. He was seemingly well liked by both the American Patriots and the Spanish Inhabitants and was able to maintain order and amity amongst the different groups.

As the Patriots moved further into Florida the resistance got stiffer, not from the Spanish, but from Native Americans and escaped slaves. For decades slaves would escape from the plantations of the Carolinas and Georgia and move into the dense forests and swamps of Florida to evade capture by Americans. Here they would set up small communities and established a working and friendly relationship with the Native Americans. Both groups had reason to oppose American expansion into Florida. The African Americans knew they would be sent back into slavery and the Native Americans were well aware of American attitudes towards native's lands and lives.

As part of this advance the Patriots asked the assistance of Captain Williams in the protection of a wagon train that was proceeding toward St. Augustine from a small fort along Davis Creek. Williams agreed to assist with twenty of his men. On September 12, the wagon train was passing through the densely forested 12 Mile Swamp when it was ambushed by a combined force of Native Americans and African Americans. Though heavily outnumbered the Marines and Georgian Patriots fought valiantly. They gained a strong defensive position that had trees to their front and swamp to their back. Though wounded eight times, Captain Williams continued to direct the men under his command. The sergeant in William's command was unable to make it to cover and was taken and scalped in view of the rest of the Marines. The

Marines rallied and made a bayonet charge and drove off their assailants. They spent the night in their defensive position and then retired back to their camp carrying the wounded Williams and the body of their sergeant. Williams died of his wounds seventeen days later.

1812: Ocean Theater

There were two schools of thought amongst the Navy about how to best utilize the young republic's small navy. One was to have ships cruise alone and take on lone enemy men of war of comparative size and merchant ships. The other philosophy was to have two or three squadrons cruise to engage convoys that were usually protected by more than a single warship. Both options would be tried, but there would be no actions between squadrons, only duels between two opposing ships and the occasional duel consisting of a single ship against two.

The first action upon the oceans occurred five days after the declaration of war. Hoping to catch enemy ships unaware of the onset of the war Commodore John Rodgers set sail from New York with the USS *President.* One June 23, the HMS *Belvidera* was spotted and chased. Not wishing to fight, the Briton tried to make her escape. The *President,* known for her speed closed and opened fire and began to pummel the enemy ship. Like their shipmates, the Marines went to their battle stations expecting to be a part of beating their foe into submission once they got into musket range, but as the final approach began tragedy struck. One of the *President*'s guns busted causing momentary chaos while at the same time British fire began to find its mark. Now every gun was suspect and sailors noticed cracks in the muzzles of other guns. The confusion, better enemy fire and the slackened American fire made it prudent to fall back and continue the chase at a safer distance until the ship and her crew had recovered but soon the darkening night made it impossible to continue the chase. In this opening action the Marines were unable to play a pivotal role because of the distance between the ships, but again they braved the hazards of battle and suffered their first casualties of the War of 1812. Private Francis Dwight was killed and Captain John Heath was wounded.

August of the year would see the first capture of a British warship by an American. The USS *Essex,* with Marines under the command of Lt. John Gamble on board, captured the smaller HMS *Alert* without resistance. Though this was cheered by the American public the officers and crew of the Essex saw no glory in capturing a smaller vessel.

Six days after the capture of the Alert came one of the most significant in the early days

of Navy and Marine Corps history. On August 19th, while cruising in the North Atlantic, about 500 miles off the coast of New England, the USS *Constitution* sighted a large ship of war. She was the HMS *Guerriere* which was considered one of the most audacious ships on the American station. The ships closed on each other and the British opened fire while the *Constitution,* under the command of Isaac Hull, held her fire and continued to close. The Marines, aloft and along the rails, made ready. Hull was within 200 yards, then 150…, just touching on the range of a lucky musket shot, and still no order to fire. All the while, the British shot slammed into the hull and tore at the sails and rigging of *Constitution*. One hundred yards and still no order to fire…, then at "half a pistol shot distance," about 50 feet, the *Constitution*'s 24 pound long guns and 32 pound carronades, often called smashers, let their iron fly. Simultaneously the Marines loosed a continuous, deadly hail of lead into the decks of the British ship. The effect was devastating. At such a close range the gunnery of the sailors tore apart the enemy ship and the quick loading and accurate Marines decimated the exposed British sailors and Royal Marines. Momentarily the ships entangled. The bowsprit of the *Guerriere* came across the aft starboard tafrail of *Constitution*. Seeing an opportunity to lead a boarding assault of the enemy vessel, Marine Lt. William Bush leapt to the top of the rail. He shouted to his captain "Shall I board her Sir?" Almost instantaneously a British musket ball slammed into Bush's head and he was dead before he hit the deck. Soon, after the ships broke free of one another, the American guns continued to obliterate the shaken enemy. Eventually, with all her masts shot away and much of her crew dead or wounded, the British frigate struck her colors. A prize crew was assembled but it was soon obvious that the battered hulk was unsalvageable and a fuse was set to blow her up. Of the fourteen American casualties Private Francis Mullen was wounded in the tops by a musket ball and, of course, Lt. Bush. Lt. Bush is the first United States Marine Corps officer to be killed in action.

The news of an American victory over an English frigate brought jubilation to the Americans and dismay to the English. The English press, and even some Americans, believed that the "handful of fir built frigates" of the U. S. Navy would only be added to the long rolls of the English navy once they had been captured and now an English ship was not just captured, it was demolished.

Two months later Marines were aboard the USS *Wasp* of 18 guns when she captured the HM Brig *Frolic* in the Caribbean.

One week later, on October 25, the USS *United States* was cruising when it came across the frigate HMS *Macedonian*. Captain Stephen Decatur decided to use the superior long guns of the United States and stayed at a distance too far for the Marines to use their muskets to any serious effect but yet again the Marines, in their stations, ready to respond to any orders given, suffered casualties in a battle they were left out of. The *Macedonian* would be the only British frigate brought to America as a prize. She was brought into New London, Connecticut and put under repair and received a small guard of Marines to secure here during her refit.

Four days after the *Macedonian* was captured the USS *Essex*, a 32 gun frigate, set sail from New York with orders to rendezvous with the *Constitution* and *Wasp*. When the appointed rendezvous was missed her intrepid Captain David Porter decided to set a course for the Pacific Ocean. On board the *Essex* was a guard of twenty-eight Marines under the command of Lt. John Gamble. The *Essex* was embarking on one of the most incredible cruises in the U.S. Navy history and Gamble was going to play a significant part.

The *Constitution*, after failing to meet and cruise with the *Essex* parted ways with the *Wasp* and set a course eastward towards the coasts of Africa and Europe. Sailing off the Azores, on December 29, a large sail was spotted and chased. As the distance closed the ship was recognized as the British frigate *Java*. The ships bore down on each other. The Marines, now under the command of Lt. John Contee, were at their stations and were well aware, as they saw the distance between the two ships shrink, that they were closing into musket range and their shots would make a difference. The ships exchanged broadsides and the Marines began to fire. The *Java* was handled and fought better than the *Guerriere* and casualties aboard the *Constitution* reflected that. But the carnage aboard the *Java* was far worse. *Java*'s Captain Henry Lambert was struck by a musket ball probably fired by a Marine in one of *Constitution*'s tops, and while he tried to remain in command his wound understandably slowed his decision making and dulled the fighting spirit of the British sailors. Like the *Guerriere* the *Java*'s masts were soon shot away and was her hull was severely torn up by the round shot delivered by the superior gunnery of the American sailors and her crew was smashed by grape shot and musket fire. Also like the *Guerriere* the *Java* was too far mangled to be sailed or towed across the ocean to an American port as a prize so she too was blown into pieces by a set charge and sent to the bottom. Among the American casualties were one Marine killed and two wounded.

The *Constitution* sailed back to Boston. The victories she and the other American ships

won against the great Royal Navy and their assault upon the British Empire's commerce had wide ranging consequences. First they were significant morale boosters for the American people. The first year of the war on land had been a disaster but here was something to be proud of. Secondly was the shock of the British people and the government. The contempt the British had had for the American Navy was now replaced with respect and some fear and the British Admiralty issued orders to their Captains not to engage American frigates in one on one battles and also that merchant ships were to cruise in convoy under the protection of Royal Navy ships. Lastly the British determined to use its superior numbers to blockade the American ships and not allow them to take to the seas and risk further loses.

1813: Northern Theater

As the campaign season approached the planners in Washington were trying to establish a plan for victory in Canada. The land campaign disasters of 1812 had to be learned from. The advances into Canada this year had to be aimed at the heart of British North America; the large cities of Montreal and Quebec. To do this the lakes had to be controlled; most importantly Lake Ontario.

Plans were drawn up for Chauncey and his squadron to assist the Army in the capture of the main British naval base at Kingston. Once accomplished the fleet would travel as far as possible down the St. Lawrence River to continue assisting the Army on its march to Montreal. But Chauncey and General Dearborn were hesitant of attacking Kingston. They were sure (even though it was not true) that the town was too heavily fortified and manned to take so they changed their focus to the far end of the lake. York (Toronto today) was a secondary naval base that was currently constructing a ship of 28 guns, it was the capital of Upper Canada and it was far less protected than Kingston.

With the troops herded onto Chauncey's ships they sailed out of Sackett's Harbour arriving off of York on April 26. On the morning of the 27th the troops were put into the longboats and ferried ashore. The Marines of the squadron remained on board the ships. Chauncey would not let them depart because he was too uncertain of the British fleet's position and could not risk not having them onboard in the case the British fleet appeared and engaged. On shore the American force drove the British forces out of the town. During the battle the British ignited their magazine and created a tremendous explosion that sent rocks and boulders in

all directions. These jagged projectiles caused the largest portion of the American casualties which included General Zebulon Pike who was crushed by a falling boulder. Soon after the town was cleared of enemy fighters the American soldiers began looting the town and burning the government buildings as well as the British fortifications and barracks. Once order was restored the captured military stores were loaded on board the fleet, the ship under construction was burned and another ship was taken intact as the newest addition to the U.S. Navy. With the troops back on board the fleet sailed to the southern shore of the lake and landed the Army at Ft. Niagara and Chauncey headed back to Sackett's to unload the spoils of victory and embark more soldiers for further operations.

In early May the fleet again sailed to the western end of Lake Ontario with plans to assault the British fortifications directly across from Fort Niagara at the mouth of the Niagara River anchored by Fort George. On May 27, the American fleet sailed into position. The soldiers on board again loaded onto the longboats. With intelligence stating that the British fleet was in Kingston the fleets Marines were ordered ashore. The Marines would go ashore with the Third Artillery Regiment in the third wave of boats to hit the beach.

As the sun rose the American ships began to shell the shore where the landing would take place. The first and second waves hit the beach and met significant resistance, but eventually began to push inland towards the fort. The Marines and the artillery came ashore and joined in the pursuit of the withdrawing enemy. With the third wave ashore and the fleet and Fort Niagara pounding Fort George the British Commander decided to withdraw and leave the nearly destroyed fort and the neighboring town of Newark to the Americans. To avoid the looting and burning like the kind that occurred after the victory of York the Marines, known for their discipline and attention to orders, were assigned to protect the town from the Army soldiers. But the Marines could not stay long. A few days later a message arrived that the all important American base at Sackett's Harbour had been attacked in the fleet's absence. Chauncey immediately called his Marines back to their ships and sailed to the home port to take measure of the damage and to prevent another attack.

While the American fleet was busy on the western end of the lake the British command decided to take similar action against the base at Sackett's Harbour. Confident the Americans were too busy, British soldiers under General Provost boarded the British fleet under the command of Captain James Yeo and sailed the short distance south across the lake towards

Sackett's. Arriving on May 28 the attack was postponed for one day which gave the defenders time to bolster their defenses. Among the defenders were the Marines left behind by the fleet to perform the essential guard duties and the Marines too sick to take to the lake. Based on incomplete documents the estimate of the number of Marines in Sackett's at the time of the attack was about twenty to twenty-five.

The Marines were posted in their fortified barracks that was actually the rear defense of Fort Tompkins. The British landed a half a mile away and moved on the post with the hopes of destroying the Navy Yard where a large ship was being constructed. They initially met militiamen but drove them back. They next met a small line of determined Army soldiers and Army volunteers anchored by a blockhouse just outside the main cantonment area of the base. A fierce battle ensued. The British made several attempts to break the line and assault the blockhouse but the fire, including musket fire from the Marines in their barracks, was too hot. Soon the militia rallied, reinforced the regulars and the fate of the attack was sealed.

Though reality showed the British they could not take the Navy Yard and its valuable stores and ship, the Naval Officer in command perceived, for an unknown reason, that all was lost and ordered the stores, the ship and the Navy and Marine Corps Barracks to be burnt to prevent them from falling into enemy hands. Sergeant Solomon Fisher of the Marines received the order to burn his barracks. He fiercely protested. He knew the enemy was going to have to retire but the order was again sent and he and his men set the fires and abandoned their positions. Meanwhile the British, licking their wounds, carrying off their wounded and abandoning their dead, retired back to their ships and sailed off defeated.

Upon recognizing the withdrawal underway the sailor, soldiers and Marines worked franticly to extinguish the fires they had set. The ship and most of the Naval quarters were saved, but the stores, including the spoils from York and the Marine Barracks were a complete loss. Not only did the Marines lose their sleeping quarters they lost all their clothing, equipment, money and records leaving them in a state of destitution for much of the remainder of the year. Emergency shipments of clothing were called for and a new barracks was soon under construction but until it was completed the Marines had to live in the few tents they were able to find.

Upon his return Chauncey was so cautious he kept his fleet in Sackett's until his new ship could be launched. Meanwhile the British fleet worked in cooperation with the British Army on

the Niagara Peninsula and made the gains of April and May untenable and soon the American force in the area was besieged in Fort George; the only Canadian land under American control after the planned great offensive of 1813.

It was not until late July, after the new ship, the *Pike*, was ready to cruise did Chauncey set sail from Sackett's. On July 28, the Marines of the fleet, in cooperation with a contingent of regulars under the command of Colonel Winfield Scott were landed on Burlington Beach at the western end of the lake with the intension of capturing a known British Army storage facility. They took and torched a small barracks, but as they approached the heights on which the stores were located they noticed the heights had been significantly reinforced by a superior force with artillery. To attack uphill into entrenched artillery would have been suicidal so the troops went back to the fleet and cruised northeast to make a second visit to York. On July 31, the Marines and soldiers landed and destroyed a large quantity of stores and transport boats.

The months of August and September on Lake Ontario would contain a series of engagements that were as close as the lake would see to decisive battles, but in all instances, knowing that a loss of control of the lake, the commander getting the worst of the fight would run to save his fleet.

The best outcome for the British was on August 10. Three days earlier a storm had sunk two of Chauncey's schooners, taking her crews, including Marines, to the bottom of the lake. When the fleets met on the 10th there was a miscommunication amongst the officers of two more of the American schooners. They turned to the larboard while the rest of the fleet turned starboard. They were cut off and taken, but the rest of the fleet escaped. The best outcome for the Americans came on September 28th. The battle and its aftermath, which came to be known as the "Burlington Races," saw the American fleet pummel the British flagship almost to the point of submission but the daring and skill of Captain and crew of the second ship of the fleet saved the flagship. This allowed the British fleet to break off and make a run for Burlington Bay to seek refuge under the guns that dissuaded the Marines from attacking in July. The Americans gave chase and the "race" was on. Chauncey had the greatest opportunity of the entire war on Lake Ontario to destroy his foe, but as the fleets approached the bay he thought it prudent to stay out of the reach of the guns on the heights instead of pressing home the attack.

The driving of the British fleet into Burlington Bay gave the Americans control of the lake for the remainder of the sailing season. When winter closed in both fleets went to their

home ports and began refitting and new construction. In all the ship to ship engagements the Marines stood ready and steadfastly under enemy fire, but due to the tactics employed by the respective commanders, they were only able to play a small role in the few, and short instances the ships came into musket range. Other than the Marines that went down on the two schooners the Marines suffered no casualties in the 1813 campaign on and along the shores of Lake Ontario.

The other front along the northern theater was Lake Erie and here, unlike on Lake Ontario, there would be one climactic battle with Marines playing an integral role. Command of the American forces on Lake Erie fell to young Oliver Hazard Perry. Perry oversaw the building and buying of a fleet of ships to match the British fleet on that lake. His largest ships would be twin 20 gun brigs that would be augmented by seven other vessels of varying armaments. The enemy had six vessels that, though fewer in number, was a relative match in armament and crew. Perry, a subordinate to Chauncey who had command over all vessels and crew on all the Great Lakes, was constantly seeking sailors and Marines from Chauncey's command on Lake Ontario. All he would receive from his commander was a small detachment of sailors and one Marine Corps sergeant. Perry sent complaints and requisitions to Washington seeking aid.

In Washington Commandant Wharton was ordered to prepare a detachment for Erie. Wharton chose Lt. John Brooks to lead a detachment west. Brooks, in fact John Brooks Jr., was a graduate of Harvard Medical School and son of Revolutionary War general, and future governor of Massachusetts John Brooks Sr. Though educated and a son of a prominent, established American hero, John Brooks Jr. sought and received a commission in the Marine Corps in 1807. Lt. Brooks was in command of the Marines of the Wasp during her successful battle against the Frolic and, like the rest of the crew, became prisoners of the British when captured after the battle and was exchanged late in 1812 and came back to Washington for duty. Stationed at the Marine Barracks in Washington, Brooks soon found himself in trouble. He was accused by fellow officers of conduct unbecoming of an officer as well as striking fellow officer, Lt. Samuel Miller. While awaiting a court martial, Brooks continuously sent letters of protest to Wharton, the Secretary of the Navy and other politicians and influential citizens. Wharton soon found a way to make this problem go away; far away. He ordered Brooks to the most remote station of the Marine Corps. Brooks left Washington DC in April with a detachment of seven Marines and proceeded overland through Maryland and Pennsylvania with orders to recruit as he

went. When he arrived at Presque Isle (Erie PA) he had a total of fifteen Marines including himself. While his Marines did their duty of guarding the ships under construction and all the government stores, Brooks continued to recruit in nearby settlements and among the various militia units that were also serving in the area. He often recruited militia members in trouble with their superiors. If they joined the Marine Corps, he would get any charges against them dropped. His efforts would net about twenty more men. He would spend the next three months training these men and making them a very disciplined force.

On August 18, the American fleet left Presque Isle and sailed towards the western end of the lake and anchored in Put-in-Bay. Aboard the fleet were Brooks and his men. The vast majority of the Marines, including Brooks, were aboard the flagship Lawrence. Marine Sergeant John Curtis was aboard the Niagara to assist Army Captain Henry Breevort train and familiarize the soldiers and militiamen in the duties of Marines. The smaller vessels carried a few militiamen and soldiers each, but no Marines. It was going to be the *Lawrence* and *Niagara* to do the greatest amount of fighting with the *Lawrence* leading the way which is the most likely reason for the posting of the Marines on board her.

On September 9, the British fleet entered the lake and was spotted the following day. The fleets formed into lines of battle and converged on each other. Perry attacked with great aggressiveness. The *Lawrence* bore down on the enemy line, getting ahead of the rest of the Americans and soon was engaged, all but alone, with the entire British fleet at close range. The Marines fired into the decks of the enemy. Lieutenant Brooks was barking out commands from a position near the helm. The Marines and sailors on board were standing to their posts but casualties were severe. As the men serving the ships guns fell, Marines put down their muskets and stood by the guns. Brooks himself was soon down. He was now notably standing near Perry displaying a cheerful disposition when a British round shot tore into Brooks' right hip and tore the right half of his pelvis away leaving his leg attached by skin and muscle. He was carried below begging Perry and his fellow officers to put him out of his misery. But none could bring themselves to do it. He would writhe in pain for almost two hours until dying of blood loss. Back above deck his men were falling quickly. Private William Christie was struck by a large splinter that entered near the left shoulder blade, ricocheted through his abdomen and came to rest near his right hip. Eleven other Marines were either dead or wounded and the most of the sailors shared the same fate, but the Lawrence had taken a toll on the enemy. When Perry

climbed into a longboat and shifted his command to the Niagara he was able to take the as of yet unscathed ship into the battle and pound the enemy into submission. The British fleet surrendered in total and Lake Erie was under American control for the rest of the war. This allowed the US Army in the Northwest to cross into Canada, seek out and rout a British army and its Native allies under the command of the famous Tecumseh who was killed in the battle.

1813: Chesapeake Theater

Quiet in the last six months of 1812 the scene along the Chesapeake changed drastically in 1813. The success of the American Navy in 1812 forced the Royal Navy to take the initiative. They blockaded the American coast from Florida to Cape Cod and concentrated on sealing the Chesapeake Bay. The Chesapeake was the home of the largest number and most successful privateers that were destroying British trade around the world. The Bay was also home of flotillas of U.S. Navy gunboats in various ports and the Gosport Navy Yard in Norfolk, Virginia where the USS *Constellation* was currently located. Taking and/or destroying these would be a significant victory for the British. Also they hoped that causing havoc so close to the nation's capital would draw troops away from the Canadian front and relieve pressure on the British forces there.

A British fleet settled into Chesapeake Bay, for the most part unopposed, in February of 1813. For the first half of the year the British concentrated on raiding small coastal towns that, at most, could only offer resistance in the form of small militia units with little or no artillery, causing chaos and gathering booty. In June the British moved nearer to Norfolk taking soundings and preparing to assault the town and capture the Navy Yard and the *Constellation.* On the 18th of that month a British frigate off of Norfolk was becalmed. Seizing the opportunity Marines from the Navy Yard and soldiers boarded a small squadron of gunboats and made an oar powered assault against the frigate. The attack was swift and caused damage but the wind soon picked up and the frigate was able to maneuver and other ships came to its rescue causing the gunboats to head back ashore.

The gunboat attack did little to dissuade the British of their plans to take Norfolk. Four days later the British launched an amphibious assault on Craney Island. Craney Island was located in the mouth of the Elizabeth River and controlled the both water and land approaches to Norfolk. Craney Island had been fortified with a small battery that was manned by sailors from

the Navy Yard. Alongside the sailors were fifty Marines under the command of Lt. Henry Breckenridge and Virginia militiamen. As the British barges approached the shore the artillery tore into them and when they came within range of the muskets the Marines and militiamen let loose their fire. Few British made it ashore alive. Those that did were soon captured or surrendered and were happy to be alive. The crippled British force crept back to their ships and set sail.

They would never again try to take Norfolk but focused elsewhere in the Bay. They sailed into the northern part of the Bay and threatened Annapolis. Amongst the Marines in Washington there was great excitement. Since the beginning of the war they had had a feeling of being left out. The Marine Corps officers expressed their wishes to go and meet the enemy. Lieutenant Samuel Miller wrote a letter to Commandant Lt. Col. Wharton, essentially begging that the Marines be sent to Annapolis to finally meet the enemy. With the blessing of the Secretary of the Navy the Marines marched to Annapolis prepared to do battle. Arriving there they were dismayed that the Navy commander, Captain Charles Morris, assigned them to a supportive role. Lt. Miller again penned a letter to the Commandant voicing the Marines' dissatisfaction with the role they were assigned. Soon, however, they would be even more disappointed. The British sailed away from Annapolis and with the threat no longer present the Marines were ordered back to Washington. No doubt disappointed. For the rest of the year the British continued plundering the shores of the Chesapeake.

1813: Southern Theater

In the southern theater there was still little happening concerning the war with Great Britain but there were still ongoing conflicts underway with Spanish held areas of North America and with Native Americans. Lieutenant Alexander Sevier, another son of a hero of the Revolution took over command of the Marines that served in Georgia and Florida under Captain John Williams. In February the Marines were a part of a retaliatory campaign against the Native American towns that had supplied the ambushing force that attacked the late Capt.Williams and the wagon train at 12 Mile Swamp. The Marines led the assault into the towns, driving out the defenders and putting them to the torch. Sevier and his men also found themselves supporting the Army in their campaigns as artillerists, but in May the US government decided that one military campaign for the time being was enough and ordered the withdrawal of all US forces

from Florida. The Marines returned to their barracks on Cumberland Island in Georgia. In May the Marines moved to Point Petre Georgia, an Army post across the channel from Cumberland Island. They soon received orders to proceed back to Washington.

Along the Gulf Coast there was also a campaign against Spanish held territory. West Florida, today Alabama, was a target of the US forces in the region, particularly the town of Mobile. In April a U.S. gunboat flotilla left the New Orleans area with Marines and soldiers anticipating an amphibious assault on the fortifications at Mobile. On April 16 the force was ready. Captain Daniel Carmick and his Marines were selected to lead the assault but Mobile surrendered without firing a shot before any attempt to land was made. The Marines encamped outside Mobile until the gunboats were ordered back to New Orleans.

1813: Ocean Theater

The year 1813 would be a much less successful year on the oceans than the previous year. Humiliating defeats at the hands of well-handled frigates and sloops-of-war had caused the Royal Navy to rethink tactics. There would be no more single ship engagements against American frigates and there would be a concerted effort to bottle up the entire American Navy in the ports. If they could not get to sea, they could not engage and possibly defeat any more ships.

However, there were some ships that slipped by the blockading British fleets and some that had departed the previous year that were still cruising the oceans of the world in search of prey. One of these was the USS *Hornet*. In February she had been cruising with the purpose of attacking British merchant vessels when she came across H.M. Brig *Peacock*. In this engagement superior American gunnery again smashed the hull and crew while a deadly hail of musketry left the spar deck of the *Peacock* heaped with dead and wounded.

One of the ships that had been sailing the seas since the previous year was the *Essex*. In late 1812 she rounded the Cape of Good Hope, becoming the first US warship to do so, with the intention of destroying the English whaling fleet which would be easy prey to a ship of her size. In the first half of 1813 the *Essex* captured twelve ships and forced other British vessels in the area to seek safety in port or leave for other regions. Some of the captured ships were sent into port to be sold for prize money, others were used to ferry the numerous captured seamen ashore while the remainder were kept and manned as supply ships to cruise with the *Essex* carrying captured stores that would allow the Americans to stay at sea.

One of the twelve ships was the *Greenwich*. Having captured three ships prior to this and supplying those with officers Captain Porter needed another officer to take charge of the *Greenwich.* Due to the lack of any other available U.S. Navy officers Porter was compelled to place Lt. Gamble in command of the ship. This made Gamble the only Marine Corps officer to command a United States vessel of war and soon the opportunity arose to test his skills as a ship's captain.

On July 14, while cruising with the *Essex* and the *Essex Junior* (formally the British whaler *Montezuma*) Gamble, aboard the *Greenwich*, sighted and chased a British vessel. As the distance closed the ship was recognized to be the *Seringapatam*, a well armed, and notorious British privateer that made its name and money taking American whalers. Gamble and his small crew outmaneuvered and, though outgunned, fired much more effective broadsides and forced the enemy to surrender.

Needing to refit and replenish fresh water supplies the American fleet sailed to Nuka Hiva in the Marquesas Island chain. When they arrived they befriended the native tribe that lived along the beaches and built a makeshift fort. However, they soon found themselves embroiled in a tribal war. The tribe they had befriended was at war with a tribe that resided in the mountainous interior of the island. On November 29, the sailors and Marines aided their native allies in an assault on their enemies. The Americans, because of their firearms were a far superior force, but the European and American tactics could not be used. The Americans soon found themselves being ambushed from all sides. They would counterattack and drive off their foes but they would soon reappear at another spot. This confusing warfare was frustrating Porter and Gamble. Eventually they gave the order for their men to give chase into the jungles. The Sailors and Marines charged into the dense underbrush and finally chased off the enemy for good. The hostile tribe soon sued for peace and Porter, Gamble and their men were greeted as heroes by their old allies. This would all change in the next year due to an incident in December. On the 24th of that month some of the "friendly" natives stole livestock from the fort. Gamble and the Marines were tasked with "convincing them to return the stolen goods. Gamble ordered a gun to be fired and his Marines marched with bayonets charged towards a gathering of natives. They soon gave in to Gamble's demands but the relationship began to sour significantly.

In May of 1814, after Porter had sailed to face the Royal Navy vessels seeking the *Essex*, the once friendly natives turned on the Americans and British prisoners that remained on the

island who were under the command of Gamble. Gamble and his ten remaining men were forced to their ships in the bay. They would eventually sail away in an effort to reach the Hawaiian Islands. They reached them, but were soon overtaken and captured by the HMS *Cherub*

*** The story of Lt. Gamble is one of the most interesting in the history of the Marine Corps. In no way did this description do it justice.

1814: Northern Theater

On Lake Erie the United States Navy enjoyed complete superiority due to Perry's victory the preceding September. On Lake Ontario, where the commanders of the two squadrons continued to avoid a climactic battle, there was a serious, backwoods, arms race. Each of the main bases, Sackett's Harbour and Kingston, continuously gained more and more workers to build larger and larger ships in a continuous attempt to out build the other. This left the contest to be summed up as such: One side would build the bigger ship, take to the lake and their foe would retreat to their home port and build a larger ship, launch it and cause the other to return to build again.

At the beginning of the war Lake Ontario's most heavily armed ship carried no more 24 guns. By 1814 there were fifty and sixty gun frigates cruising and one hundred plus gun, ships-of-the-line on the stocks. To fill the required guards for the growing fleet the Marine Corps recruited and continuously transferred men to Sackett's. Marines considered not necessary for the public good in the eastern Navy Yards and from ships, which were now bottled up by the tightening British blockade, were a part of a continuous deployment northward. The most impressive of these re-deployments came April 14, 1813. Commandant Wharton, on orders of the Secretary of the Navy, ordered the Marine Barracks in Hampstead SC closed and for Capt. Wainwright to march his small to headquarters. On his way, Wainwright was to recruit more men. Once at headquarters Marines from Gosport VA and headquarters were added. On July 6, Wainwright was to continue his march north. He was now to stop at Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York adding detachments. He would arrive at Sackett's on August 2nd with nearly sixty. More men would continue to arrive and by mid-1814 there were 255 Marines stationed there making it the largest force of Marines at any one place during the entire war. Yet, because of the strategic dancing employed by the respective commanders this large force would not see any

serious action for the rest of the war.

The lake that would see Marines in action in 1814 was Lake Huron. The control of Lake Erie and the addition of ships due to their capture in battle made it possible for the American Navy to expand its reach into the next link in the Great Lakes chain. Lake Huron, though not militarily as important as Erie or Ontario it was a significant economic target. At the point where Lake Huron met Lake Michigan, known as the Straits of Michilimacinac was the island of the same name. On the heightened end of the island was a fort that had fallen into British hands in the first month of the war. The island and its fort dominated the trade between the two lakes and to those further downstream. That trade was the lucrative fur trade that, in America, was dominated by the politically connected John Jacob Astor. Besides the economic stature of the lake recent intelligence, which was correct, indicated that the British were planning on creating a ship yard and building a new fleet in Georgian Bay. There was one British warship on Lake Huron at the time, the sloop *Nancy*. So in a hope to restore control over the strait and Lake Huron by capturing the fort at Michilimacinac, wanting to capture or destroy the *Nancy* and prevent the completion of a new navy yard a fleet sailed from Lake Erie into Lake Huron.

On July 20, the American fleet came upon the town of St. Joseph which contained a small fort and barracks whose garrison fled at the sight of the fleet. The Marines of the fleet and the accompanying soldiers landed and destroyed them both without a fight. The fleet continued on to the main objective of Michilimacinac and arrived in the opening days of August.

On August 4, the Marines and soldiers landed in an attempt to take the fort. However, the fort was too highly situated for the fleet's guns to be any assistance and the determined garrison made a strong stand. The soldiers, who led the attack, were pushed back by the British artillery. The Marines, who were kept in reserve, were brought up to cover the retreat. Their efforts that day brought high praise from the grateful Army colonel that had led the failed attack. In the battle one Marine was wounded. Ten days later the Marines and soldiers made another amphibious landing at the mouth of the Nautauwasaga River. There they captured a blockhouse and destroyed the *Nancy*.

<u>1814: Chesapeake Theater</u>

Since the beginning of 1813 the Royal Navy had complete dominance over the Chesapeake Bay. The gunboats in the various harbors could do little against the armada of

British vessels and the larger ships could not attempt to break out. The constant raids and major attacks, successful or otherwise, caused discontent and distress throughout the region and, to many, signaled an ineptitude amongst the nation's leaders. There was a need for a plan. There was need for an individual to execute that plan and in mid-1813 the plan came from the man who could do it.

Barney, an aging, semi-retired Navy captain spent the early part of the war as a successful privateer, but thought it his responsibility to, at the least, ease the pressure on the region he called home. In July of 1813 he proposed a plan to build and man a squadron of sturdy, shallow draft gunboats that could be powered by oar and/or sail. The gunboats could outgun the launches used by the British to land their troops but could use the dual propulsion to outrun the ships they could not outfight. In the spring of 1814 the flotilla set sail in an effort to harass the enemy. A series of hit and run attacks gave some good news to the people of the region and got the attention of the British who became determined to capture or destroy the flotilla. After one of the flying attacks on a small British flotilla the Americans were forced to flee into the Patuxent River by larger British ships coming to the aid of their comrades. Seeking a better defensive position Barney moved his flotilla up St. Leonard's Creek. The creek was too shallow for the larger British ships to make an attempt and would force the smaller British vessels to make any assault. On June 10 the British attempted an attack up the creek. Predicting the move Barney was well prepared and he drove the enemy back into the Patuxent. Unable to assault Barney the British decided to keep him out of the mix by blockading the mouth of the creek. Hoping to draw Barney into action the British went on a destructive spree in the surrounding area, but Barney did not take the bait. In an effort to assist Barney the Secretary of the Navy called upon Commandant Wharton to send all available Marines with three 12 pound field guns from Washington to protect Barney's flanks. Captain Samuel Miller and 114 Marines marched five days to the creek and threw up an earthen breastwork on a hill overlooking the creek to assist in "annoying the enemy." Still, the position seemed hopeless and orders came to dismantle the flotilla and bring the men overland to Washington. However, on the same day the order was issued to break up the flotilla Col. Decius Wadsworth of the ordinance department offered to go to the creek with two 18 pound guns to coordinate an attack to break Barney out of the creek. At dawn on June 26, Wadsworth's 18s, along with Miller's 12s, supported by six hundred infantry, opened fire on the two blockading frigates. According to eye witness reports

the Marines' fire is what cause the largest share of damage to the frigates. Barney then moved his flotilla down the creek and "joined in the chorus" and the British ships were driven away. The flotilla had escaped, but the success was not without controversy. The Marines served their guns with such speed that they ran out of solid shot ammunition before Wadsworth's 18 pounders. Unable to use his remaining grapeshot against the frigates Miller moved his guns towards the river to fire upon British barges that were heading further up the Patuxnet in an attempt to flank the battery. Miller's counter movement confused the supporting infantry officers, who mistook the movement as a retreat and proceeded to order their command to withdraw the field. Miller, seeing his infantry support leaving assumed they were aware of some danger or an order he did not and thought it prudent to follow. In turn, the flotillamen and Wadsworth, manning the 18 pounders, saw the entire body of troops leaving without them and quickly spiked their guns and got into the retreating line. The ensuing disagreements over the actions of that day became a personal war of words in the region's newspapers in which Captain Miller became very aggressive. At one point Miller came just short of daring Col. Wadsworth to a duel. Eventually the President of the United States stepped in and ordered the Secretary of the Navy to order a court of inquiry into Miller's actions. Miller was eventually cleared, but the entire episode left a desire to prove that he and his men were not the type to leave a fight. Less than two weeks after the end of the court of inquiry the Marines would have their chance.

The year 1814 was going to be the year the might of the British Empire was going to chastise the upstart Americans and bring about a beneficial conclusion to the war. Napoleon was defeated in Europe (for the time being) and the British now had resources to accomplish their goal. While the main US forces were busy assaulting the Niagara Peninsula the British planned a three pronged attack against the U.S. The main assault would come down the Hudson River to cut off anti-war New England from the rest of the states hoping to establish a separate peace with that region of the country. The other two offensives were going to be diversionary. One would focus on the battered Chesapeake Bay region and the other on New Orleans.

The Hudson Valley campaign and the move on the Chesapeake would be almost simultaneous while the attack on New Orleans would come a few months later when more forces were in place. The move down Lake Champlain/Hudson Valley would come to a halt in September 1814 with the defeat of a British Fleet on Lake Champlain. The American fleet on Lake Champlain lacked United States Marines. The need for Marines on Lake Ontario and

among the growing deep water fleet made it impossible, even after numerous requests, to supply the needed Marines. Soldiers from the nearby Army regiments would stand in as Marines for the battle and do a commendable job.

In the Chesapeake region the British had reinforced the fleet with infantry. The British officers debated their target. Would it be Washington or Baltimore? Baltimore would be a much greater strategic target but Washington, as the nation's capital, would be a massive psychological blow to their enemy. The decision was made to make the attempt on Washington.

On August 19, the British force was landed in Upper Marlboro MD for the march overland to the capital. The American force that was supposed to meet the battle hardened British was composed predominantly of local militia. Of the nearly 6,000 Americans there would only be a few small groups of professionals. One of those groups was the 114 Marines under Samuel Miller. Initially left out of the defensive plans by the General William Winder, who often seemed to be confused, the Marines were left in Washington without orders. With the Marines were the flotilla men under Joshua Barney numbering roughly 400 men. Barney was told to use his men and the Marines to protect another route into Washington. Knowing the battle was not coming in their direction Barney sought out the Secretary of the Navy and requested to be sent to the battlefield. The Marines and sailors, pulling with them the three 12 pounders and two 18 pounders double timed it to the battle and arrived just as the battle started.

Still without orders Barney place the two large guns in the middle of the road leading to Washington. Miller would place his guns on Barney's right. The Marines and sailors not serving the five guns were formed up into lines of infantry. Together with a militia rifle company to their extreme right they formed the third, and last defensive line. They watched as the two lines in their front collapsed under the disciplined advance of the British and the terrifying, screeching and erratic Congreve Rockets.

Now the British bore down on the Marines and sailors. They advanced right down the road into the mouth of guns. When the guns opened up they cleared the road. The Marines and sailors poured volley after volley of musket fire into the British ranks and drove them back. The red lines advance again to meet the same fate. With their enemy falling back the Marines and sailors audaciously charged the larger enemy and pursued them over a rail fence and into a ravine. Climbing over the fence struck a familiar cord with the Marines and sailors. As they leapt and climbed over the rails they let out the scream, "board 'em." With the enemy driven

back it was necessary to return and protect the guns. The Marines and sailors again formed into line. Recognizing the danger of another frontal assault on the position the British decided to move on the Marines' right flank. Their approach was too much for the untried militiamen. After only firing a few volleys they turned and fled. With the high ground theirs the British again focused on the Marines and sailors. At close range the enemies poured rounds into each other. Miller himself was in a personal duel with a single British soldier who he perceived to be aiming for him. They exchanged fire and began to reload. Miller, having trouble with his flint, could not load quick enough and his nemesis planted a ball into his arm. Barney was also down with a ball in his thigh and the rank and file Marines and sailors began taking heavy casualties. Soon Miller's second in command Captain Alexander Sevier and Lt. William Nicholls were also wounded and the mounting casualties made an already impossible situation worse. Orders were given to retire back to Washington to make another stand. Upon arriving there it was evident that they and Barney's sailors were among a very small group hoping to make the stand. Realizing the hopelessness of the situation they again retired in search for the remnants of the main army. They were last seen in Georgetown and still moving towards Virginia. The heroic stand at Bladensburg cost the Marines eight dead, three officers and twelve rank and file wounded and five MIA/POW.

With the resistance broken the British moved into the capital city intending to punish the Americans. Government buildings, including the Capital, the White House, Treasury and many others were put to the torch. The Navy Yard was looted and burned, but the Marine Barracks and Commandants House were left untouched. Tradition says that it was spared out of respect for the stand the Marines had made at Bladensburg, but it was more likely to their close proximity to residential houses. The British, sensitive to the plight of the neighbors, showed a mercy and let the Marine Corps quarters alone. The following day the British left Washington to return to their ships.

The approach of the British to Washington caused a call by the Secretary of the Navy for all available Navy and Marine Corps personnel close to the region to march to the defense of the city. Unable to arrive in time some of these units would try to make the withdrawal as painful as possible.

While most of the British troops were busy at Bladensburg and Washington the fleet had moved up the Potomac. As the fleet moved upriver it encountered resistance that was less than

heroic. The city of Alexandria immediately raised a white flag and the artillery unit at Fort Warburton blew up their post before firing a shot. Buoyed by their easy victory the British began to retrace their course back down the Potomac River. Their decent would not be as easy. Along the river banks were a growing number of militia, sailors and Marines. Commodore Rogers had come down from Philadelphia on orders from the Secretary of the Navy with sailors from the blockaded ships. It was hoped he would arrive on time to protect the capital. He was now charged with harassing their retreat. Rogers acquired a small flotilla of river coasters in the Potomac, armed a few of them and filled the rest with combustibles. He planned to attack the rear of the retiring British fleet and sail his "fire ships" into the enemy vessels. A determined assault was made, but wind, tide and the sheer size of the British fleet overpowered American courage and little damage was done.

Continuing down the river, the British were unaware of what was ahead of them. On the heights above the river at a place known as White House, Virginia, Captain Porter, the hero of the *Essex*, with a force of sailors and militia accompanied by the remnants of the Marines from Washington, now under the command of Captain Samuel Bacon, Quartermaster of the Marine Corps constructed a battery mounting thirteen guns of various sizes. The British fleet would have to sail close to the heights to remain in the channel and not run aground. The Marines and militia formed up under the concealment of vegetation along the shore. When the fleet, forced by the channel towards the shore, sailed into point blank artillery and musket range, the battery, and the Marines opened up. Caught by surprise the fleet halted and backed their ships in an effort to better meet the onslaught. They made numerous attempts to get by the American position, but each time had to halt and retreat. Between September 1 and 4 the British were halted in the river, but by the 4th the ammunition for the guns were running short and the British, weighing down their port sides and removing the wheels from the rear of their carriages to gain elevation were finally able to fire into the American positions and forced their way past the battery. In the battle two Marines were killed.

With the British now out of reach orders were received to proceed to Baltimore which many rightfully expected would be the next target. In the first few days of September the Marines from Washington would meet up in Baltimore with Marines assigned to the USS *Guerriere*, then under construction in Baltimore, the Marines from the USS *Ontario* also in Baltimore Harbor and detachments from the small Baltimore shipyard and from the Philadelphia

Navy Yard. A total of roughly 170 Marines are formed into an infantry battalion attached to nearly 1000 sailors from the mentioned posts under the command of Commodore John Rogers. The arrival of the Marines and sailors stiffened the resolve of the people of Baltimore who prior to their arrival were contemplating capitulation. The Marines and sailors now joined the citizens, soldiers and slaves in the erection of a series of defensive positions. In the center of the American line was "Rodger's Bastion" where the Marines and sailors would anchor the American defense.

The British plan of attack on Baltimore was composed of a land assault combined with a naval assault on the main fortification in Baltimore Harbor: Fort McHenry. On September 12 the British forces ashore advanced on Baltimore. They met stiff resistance at the Battle of North Point. Here, unlike Bladensburg, the American force, still comprised mainly of militia, stood and fought well and made a strategic retirement from the field back to the defensive positions just outside the city. During the battle the British commander was killed and a sense of gloom came over the British. They needed a great success from the naval attack on Fort McHenry. On the morning of September 13, an intense twenty-five hour bombardment of the fort began. The Marines, sailors, soldiers and militiamen watched in awe as the rockets soared and the bombs burst over the fort. The next morning, when it became evident that the fort did not fall, the British commanders looked uphill at trenches ahead of them and thought it prudent to retire back to their ships.

<u>1814-15 Southern Theater</u>

While the British force that was to attack New Orleans was waiting for reinforcements there was plenty of work for the Marines in that region. On September 15 and October 16 the Marines, along with some Army soldiers assaulted the Baritarian Smugglers base of operations on Grand Terre Island. Both times the Marines led the assault driving the "pirates" deep into the swamps and destroying the ships, goods and settlements they had built.

However, by mid-December the British were near and preparations were made to defend the city. The Marines were a part of a varied army comprised of soldiers, Native Americans (namely Choctaw Indians), militiamen from Kentucky and Tennessee, militia from New Orleans, both white citizens and the Free Men of Color. The British avenue of attack was through Lake Borgne. In their way was a small flotilla of five gunboats. Aboard those gunboats were thirty-

five Marines and one hundred-fifty sailors. To attack these gunboats the British sent forty barges with over a thousand men. The overwhelming numbers defeated the determined resistance of the Americans but the battle gave General Andrew Jackson and his army more precious time to prepare.

Eventually advanced elements of the British army landed and made their way southward through the bayous and swamps and encamped on the northern bank of the Mississippi River about eight miles below the city of New Orleans. On December 23, General Jackson launched an assault on the British camp. The Battle began when the USS *Carolina* slid down river on the current. She was to open fire on the British camp which would also cause the forces on land to move into action. On Jackson's right, moving along the levee of the river were three pieces of artillery supported by fifty-five Marines led by Lt. Francis de Bellevue. When the artillery and Marines became engaged they poured iron and lead into the confused, forming lines of the British. The disciplined veterans of the British army did eventually form and made a bold attempt to seize the artillery. The fifty-five Marines in support of the artillery, though maintaining an incessant rate of fire, were numerically overmatched and began to "recoil" in the face of the advancing mass of the enemy. Soon, however, support from a detachment of the 7th Infantry led by Jackson himself strengthened the positions and British were forced to fall back without their prizes. Major Carmick, the ranking Marine Corps officer was also engaged, but was not leading his Marines. Carmick, known for his skill and leadership, was assigned to lead a entire battalion of New Orleans Volunteers known as Plauche's Battalion. Carmick would use Plauche's Battalion to solidify Jackson's left with the aid of the Tennessee and Kentucky militia and Choctaw Indians. When the British recognized the strength of Jackson's right some were moved to flank his left. Here they ran into Major Carmick and the rest of the left wing. Here too, they were held and driven back. With casualties mounting on both sides, each decided to retire to their camps. Though Jackson did not drive the invaders from American soil as he had hoped, he caused the British to call upon and wait for greater numbers advancing from their fleet. This wait allowed Jackson to retire and finish his main defensive line, Line Jackson, on the plains of Chalmette, about a mile closer to the city. By all accounts, the "Night Battle" on December 23 was as ferocious as most men would ever see. Yet, amazingly, the Marines suffered no reported casualties.

Paradoxically, on December 24, nearly five thousand miles away in Ghent, Belgium, the

representatives of the United States and Great Britain signed a peace treaty, which upon ratification by the respective governments, would bring an end to the war. But due to the inherent slowness of communications at this time the armies and navies of the countries would not know about the peace for weeks, some in months and in one case, as late as June of 1815. So, in New Orleans, the war continued.

On December 28, the British, now reinforced made a probing attack against the American line. An artillery and rocket barrage ensued as British units pushed forward to test the line. In that line were sixty-six Marines, again under Lt. Bellevue. Major Carmick was there also. Again assisting in leading Plauche's Battalion and as acting as an aide to Jackson. While on horseback, delivering orders to the different commanders, Major Carmick's horse was struck and killed by a rocket. The explosion tore off Carmick's thumb and sent shrapnel into his body. The attacked withered as American fire held off the advancing British and the two sides again settled into their positions waiting for the next move. Meanwhile Major Carmick was brought back to his quarters in New Orleans to recover. However, he would never truly recover and he died in November of 1815 as a direct result of his wounds.

On January 1, 1815, the British took aim once again at the American positions with a larger artillery and rocket salvo, but their guns were soon silenced from superiorly aimed American counter-battery fire. Finally, on January 8, the British made their main assault on the American defenses at Rodriguez Canal. The Marines, under Lt. Francis de Bellevue, were in the center of the American line to the right of Battery 7. The frontal assault made by the British was first met with murderous artillery fire. Then rifle fire and then musket fire as their distance closed. British casualties littered the ground. Those intrepid few that made it to the ditch in front of the American works were met by a countercharge of Marines and soldiers. The enemy was crushed. The British suffered nearly fifteen-hundred casualties while the Americans casualties numbered about fifty. Again, none of them Marines, yet for their part the Marines in the battle of January 8 and for their performance during the entire campaign they received thanks and praise from General Jackson and an official statement of gratification from Congress.

<u>1814-15 Ocean Theater</u>:

The first action on the Oceans in 1814 would bring about the end of the incredible cruise of the *Essex*. In December 1813 she had sailed from the Marquesas Island in search of the British

warships searching for her. When they met the *Essex* was outnumbered. She tried to make a run for the open sea but part of her main mast was taken off by a gale. Without hope of getting away Porter settled into an uneven fight. Besides being outnumbered the *Essex* was mainly armed with carronades that are only effective at close range and the British ships were armed with long range long guns. A few times the ship closed and the Marines opened fire from their stations, but the damage to the Essex made the ship too hard to control. Unable to carry out a battle of maneuver, Porter anchored his ship with his most effective broadside facing the enemy. However, the enemy stood off and with his long guns picked the *Essex* apart. Soon the only thing to do was surrender. The surviving sailors and Marines were almost immediately paroled and sent home aboard a ship out of Chile bound for New York. This is what allowed Porter and many of his men to take part in the Battle of White House and defense of Baltimore in September 1814(mentioned earlier).

A month later the *Peacock* took the HMS *Empervier*. This victory was followed by two victories of the USS *Wasp* over the *Reindeer* and *Avon*. On Board the *Wasp* were a total of five Marines that received the accolades of their officer. However, the Marines and the other men of the *Wasp* would never return to a heroes welcome. Sometime soon after the second victory the *Wasp* disappeared somewhere in the Atlantic with a complete loss of life. In March of 1815 the *Hornet* captured HM Brig *Penguin.* In all these actions, which occurred at close range, the Marines served with distinction by sweeping the enemy decks nearly clear of opposition when the time arrived for the sailors to board.

One of the frigates that had slipped by the blockade was the USS *Adams.* On board were 25 Marines under the command of Lt. Edmund Watson. The Adams had a successful cruise against British merchantmen but on her way back to the U.S. she was chased into the Gulf of Maine where she grounded. She was again floated and she sailed up the Penobscot River to escape her pursuers and refit but the British had undertaken an offensive to take Maine and they were soon within striking distance of the *Adams.* With only an unreliable militia to support the Marines and sailors the ship was burned and the Americans withdrew. One Marine was too ill to take so he was left in the care of locals but the British took him as a prisoner and he was sent to a prisoner camp in Nova Scotia.

Like the situation during the New Orleans campaign the respective navies were unaware that a peace settlement had been reached. So on January 14 the USS *President* tried to slip out of

New York Harbor but she ran aground. Though she was floated again she sustained damage that slowed her significantly and in pursuit were four British ships of equal or greater strength. The first British ship that approached was the HMS *Endymion.* A desperate battle ensued. The *President*'s Marines under Lt. Levi Twiggs fought ferociously. The British tops were cleared and the spar deck was constantly hit by the Marine marksmen in the tops. The *President*'s guns soon knocked the enemy out of the battle and the *President* continued her effort to escape but the damage from running aground combined with the battle damage left her at the mercy of the other three ships. There was no other choice but surrender.

Like the *President* the *Constitution* made a run for the ocean but unlike the *President* she made it into the open ocean and sought out prey. Aboard the *Constitution* there were 50 Marines under Captain Archibald Henderson. On February 20 the *Constitution* sighted two enemy ships that, combined, were stronger than her but her commander, Captain Charles Stewart engaged. The battle took place at night with only the discharges of weapons lighting the area around the ships. Captain Stewart made a masterful move. He concentrated on and defeated one of his enemies, then actually backed the ship up into raking position on the other. Like *Constitution*'s first two major battle, this contest was at close range. The Marines in her tops were able to deliver well aimed and deadly fire onto the enemy's deck. Again the seamanship, gunnery and steady fire of the Americans compelled the enemy to strike. When the battle was over and the *Constitution* returned home Captain Henderson had the honor of delivering the captured colors of the enemy to the Congress and the President.

The last action of the war came at the end of June 1815, more than six months after the peace agreement was signed. The USS *Peacock*, on a daring cruise into the Indian Ocean, still had not received news of the peace when she came across the armed brig *Nautilus* owned by the British East India Company. As the *Peacock* bore down the commanding officer of the *Nautilus* hailed the Americans telling them that peace had been declared. Weary of being tricked the Americans did not heed his information and closed and opened fire with cannon and muskets. The *Nautilus* immediately surrendered. When the prize crew boarded the enemy ship they were given a series of newspapers that confirmed what the British officer had told them. The Americans quickly apologized and handed the ship back over to the British captain and crew and made for home. The final shots had been fired.

Conclusion

The War of 1812 and its peripheral events gave the Marines plenty of opportunities to prove themselves and they did just that. Considered by many as unnecesary and extravagant security guards for ships and navy yards at prior to the war, the undermanned, underpaid and often undersupplied men of the Marine Corps fought with a determination that won the admiration and respect of their nation and their enemies.

Suggested Reading

General War of 1812 Books:

The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict by Donald Hickey

Amateurs, to Arms!: A Military History of the War of 1812 by John Elting

Naval War of 1812:

The Naval War of 1812 by Theodore Roosevelt

Documentary History of the Naval War of 1812; 3 Vols., Naval Historical Center

Chesapeake Bay Theater:

Terror on the Chesapeake by Chris George

The Dawns Early Light by Walter Lord

The Burning of Washington by Anthony Pitch

Flotilla: Battle for the Patuxent by Donald Shomette

Northern/Lake Theater

Lords of the Lake by Robert Malcomson (Lake Ontario)

A Signal Victory by David Skaggs and Gerard Altoff (Lake Erie)

Southern Theater

Florida Fiasco by Patrick Rembrandt Wallace

Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana in 1814-15 with an Atlas, Revised Edition, by Arsene LaCarriere Latour

The Battle of New Orleans by Robert Remini

The British at the Gates by Robin Reilly