



The American Revolution

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Sons of the American Revolution

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The Continental Marines: Article 1 of 2

The Continental Marines were a marine fighting force organized by the American Colonies during the American Revolutionary War. In accordance with the Continental Marine Act of 10 November 1775, made by the 2nd Continental Congress at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the organization of America's Marine Corps was enacted and fulfilled. Two battalions were to be raised, consisting of one Colonel, two Lieutenants Colonels, two Majors, and other officers as needed. No persons were considered for officer service, who were not seasoned, experienced seamen. By December, one battalion with five companies and a total count of 300 men was formed, and set sail with Commander Esek Hopkins of the Continental Navy's first squadron on its first cruise.

This original battalion of marines was drawn from General George Washington's army and plans to recruit a second battalion from the New York and Philadelphia areas were in the making. This second force was to be used as an amphibious force for the invasion of Halifax, Nova Scotia, which was a major staging area for British forces in North America. Britain imported several regiments-of-foot and cavalry, which were supported by an army of 3,000 Hessian mercenaries. General Washington wisely

concluded that such an American marine invasion would be folly and expressed his opinion that the marines were not needed. However, others in the colonial government felt differently, and named Captain Samuel Nicholas as the first Marine Commandant, and who was commissioned as such on 28 November 1775. Soon afterwards, a marine barracks was raised at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The first recruiting depot was most likely the *Conestoga Waggon*, a tavern owned by the Nicolas family. Four additional marine security companies were recruited from this location, and assigned to help General Washington protect Philadelphia.

Commander Esek Hopkins was given orders to set sail and “sweep the southern seas clear of British ships.” Instead, he chose to land an invasion force at New Providence Island in the Bahamas and make assault on Nassau. This was the first time America invaded a foreign country, and the first amphibious landing of the Continental Marines on a foreign beach. In thirteen days of battle, they secured two forts, occupied the town of Nassau, controlled the Government House, seized 88 guns (artillery), 16,535 shells and an abundant quantity of supplies, but failed to capture the main supply of British gun powder. On 8 April 1776, the Continental Marines engaged a British ship, supplying ample musket fire and aided the Continental Navy with broadside cannon fire. This squadron captured four British ships before returning to Rhode Island. Seven Marines were killed in this action, including Lieutenant John Fitzpatrick. Commander Hopkins was disgraced for having disobeyed orders, but Marine Captain Nicholas was promoted to Major, and tasked with raising four new companies of Continental Marines to be stationed on four new frigates under construction.

This was a historic expedition, marking the first time the Continental Navy was sent on a mission, the first time the Continental Navy and Marines set foot on a foreign shore, the first successful landing and occupation of a foreign territory, the first time the American flag flew over a foreign land, the first time the Continental Navy and Marines conducted a successful engagement against the British Navy, and the first Continental Marine casualties of the Revolutionary War. Urah!