

**“The Sons of Neptune and of Mars”:
Organisational Identity and Mission in the Royal Marines, 1827-1927**

John D. Bolt

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The thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Portsmouth.

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Declaration

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

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Abstract

“The Sons of Neptune and of Mars”: Organisational Identity and Mission in the Royal Marines, 1827-1927

Existing historiography on the Royal Marines emphasises the institution's early roles in the Age of Sail or more recent history as Commandos. While historically the Marines were formed from early army regiments, in 1755 the Marines were permanently established under the Admiralty, retaining much of its organisational structure and traditions from the army. Honoured as a Royal Regiment in 1802, they were left largely free to develop an independent organisational identity in line with established duties at sea and on shore. The Royal Marines, however, did not share an equal footing with their peer services. As a sub-organisation of the Royal Navy, Marines were sensitive to their inferior relative status with the army and navy and a common lament of Marines was a lack of public recognition. This was especially true for Marine officers who struggled to fit in to a rigid hierarchical military social structure. By the mid-nineteenth century, changes in warfare and technology eroded once established roles and missions of the Royal Marines. Royal Marine identity became increasingly in conflict with the Royal Navy and impeded a clear solution for a new operational mission and purpose. Absorption by the army, outright elimination, or forced restructuring of their organisation threatened the extinction of the Royal Marines. As the nineteenth century progressed, the Marines wrestled over concerns of redundancy and their officers as superfluous aboard ship. These portrayals contrasted with an often-blameless record of service and reputed bravery and efficiency. Opportunities to reorganise and reform at the conclusion of the First World War were mismanaged, necessitating a complete transformation in the mid-twentieth century. Challenging recent historiography on the organisational history and identity of the Royal Marines, this thesis demonstrates how the existential struggle of the Royal Marines was rooted in a series of crises and events between 1827 and 1927.

Note on Terms

Throughout this thesis, the Royal Marines will be frequently referred to as 'The Corps of Marines' and 'Marine Corps'. These were terms of contemporary usage for the British Marines of this period and remain in frequent application today. I have therefore used these terms throughout my thesis to refer to the British Marines exclusively. In cases where foreign services are mentioned which are also marine forces, these will be further described using the name or abbreviated initials before their service (i.e. US Marine Corps).

As for capitalisation and lower case, I have always capitalised Corps or Division in keeping with the organisational practices of the Royal Marines, unless it is directly inappropriate to the content or discussion. Marines are to be capitalised when I am referring to them as the institution or the term becomes descriptive (i.e. the Marines or Marine officers). When the discussion changes to individuals or collective persons, it is noted as 'marine' or 'marines' in the lower case.

Finally, in the matter of direct quotations from primary sources which includes published works, I have maintained in all cases the original authors' capitalisation and emphasis (i.e., underscores, punctuation, etc.) practices for all direct quotes. These, where cited, are further described with details as to the original author's purpose and emphasis. For any other defects in the text, I am the sole responsibility.

List of Images

All images were taken by the author in public spaces and not subject to copyright

Image 1 – Royal Marines Memorial, St James' Park, London

Image 2 – detail, Royal Marines Memorial, St James' Park, London

Glossary of commonly used terms and abbreviations

ADM	Admiralty Archives
CAB	Cabinet Papers
CCA	Churchill College Archives
CHAR	The Chartwell Papers
HC	House of Commons
LtCol	Lieutenant Colonel
NMM	The National Maritime Museum
RC	Royal Commission
RM	Royal Marines
RMA	Royal Marines Artillery
RMLI	Royal Marines Light Infantry
RMM	Royal Marines Museum
RN	Royal Navy
TNA	The National Archives
USMC	United States Marine Corps
WO	War Office

Introduction

Claiming over 350 years of service, Britain's Corps of 'Sea Soldiers', the Royal Marines has experienced dramatic rises and falls to its fortunes. While the earliest formations of maritime regiments were with the British army, the Marines became indelibly linked to the Royal Navy in 1755. At the start of the nineteenth century, the Corps was designated a Royal Regiment in 1802, but as the nineteenth century progressed and the Royal Navy adapted to changes in technology and warfare, the future of the Corps was increasingly in doubt. In addition, Royal Marine Officers also struggled with perceptions of social inferiority in the hierarchy of the British military forces, by both the other military services and the general British public. Some of these perceptions were very real, based on institutional practices in the War Department and Admiralty, while others were fabrications derived from social mores of the period. What were the obstacles which challenged the continued relevance and existence of the Royal Marines?

This thesis is an examination of the unique military identity and the organisational development of the Royal Marines from 1827 to 1927. In current popular imagination, the Royal Marines clad in their iconic green berets, are the Royal Navy's elite fighting force. Claiming over 350 years of service to Britain, the Royal Marines Commandos, as they are known today, underwent a comprehensive transformation in the mid-twentieth century, ushering in a complete transformation of their organisational structure and a radical shift in their operational role.¹ These changes were so significant that, as noted by one eminent historian of the Royal Marines, marines of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would hardly recognise their descendants of the latter half of the twentieth.² The three services, or tri-services as they are known today are the Royal Navy, the British Army, and the Royal Air Force, while the Royal Marines remain as one of the aforementioned five fighting arms within the Royal Navy.³ Their present day role as stewards of Britain's amphibious capabilities, belies their history as an embattled regiment whose existence was in fact most often precarious and not always assured. Traditionally marginalised amidst their sister services in the Army and the Navy, by the late-nineteenth century new technologies and reforms adopted by the Royal Navy further perpetuated the perception that the Royal Marines occupied increasingly ambiguous space and were anachronistic to Britain's imperial defence needs. The turn of the twentieth century brought further ambitious schemes to reform the Naval Service and threatened to make the Corps itself redundant. While this period of British history has been well recorded and examined by

¹ Julian Thompson, *The Royal Marines: From Sea Soldiers to a Special Force*, (London: Pan MacMillan, 2001) 3. Julian Thompson has cited 1942 as a "watershed" year for changes in the Royal Marines. The impact being, according to Thompson, that "the rate of change" that the Royal Marines experienced was such that by the last quarter of the twentieth century, the Corps would have been "almost unrecognizable" to anyone who had served in it during the first quarter.

² Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 2-3.

³ The United Kingdom's three services are the Royal Navy, the British Army, and the Royal Airforce <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-defence> - accessed 2 March 2020.

social, military, and naval historians, few have examined the experience of the Royal Marines and its membership in detail.

Naval history occupies a specialised appeal to the general public and a growing interest to academics. Texts on naval history have originally been perceived as only relevant to those with interests toward professional military education. Frequently, it has served a key function of informing the membership of the Royal Navy on matters of naval history and has been taught, studied, and researched largely in context to understanding military organisations, technology, military leadership, and grand strategy. Consequently, the substantive story of the Royal Marines, due in part to its own organisational weakness and its being chronically bereft of political clout, has followed a similar path finding it largely subsumed within that of the Royal Navy. More recently, naval historians have examined the Royal Navy and naval history through emergent lens of the so-called “new naval history”.⁴ This thesis aims to contribute to this growing body of work, separating the important story of the Royal Marines out from that of its larger parent body, and simultaneously examining the underexamined yet important developmental period of crisis and contribution for the Corps from 1827 to 1927.

This study examines the organisational history of the Royal Marines. It will be argued here that the unique military identity and organisational culture constructed by the Royal Marines became increasingly incompatible and was in direct conflict with that of their parent organisation, the Royal Navy, by the turn of the twentieth century. This increasingly fragile identity compounded the problems of the Royal Marine’s elusive quest of defining a coherent mission, aggravated further by its own institutional failings to properly innovate and adapt. It was these failures and challenges which ultimately necessitated the complete organisational transformation which took place in the mid-twentieth century. This study of the organisational and social history of the Royal Marines in a defined period between 1827 to 1927, will examine these arguments using two interconnected themes: firstly, how the development and cultivation of the unique Royal Marine identity and organisational culture by its members set them apart from the other services, and secondly, how the Royal Marines as a military organisation sought to adapt their purpose and mission in this period. The analysis of key events and themes are anchored between 1827 and 1927 and will demonstrate how the constructed identity of the Corps eroded its very purpose and function. While discussed in further detail in the first chapter, 1827 signifies the date in which the emblems and traditions commonly used by the Corps to this date in their colours and uniforms were codified. The year 1927 serves as a useful concluding date where in a defining moment of the interwar period, a mission for the

⁴ Roger Knight “Changing the Agenda: The ‘new’ naval history of the British sailing navy”, *The Mariner's Mirror*, 97:1, (2011) 225-242.

Royal Marines was simultaneously decided and yet remained unfulfilled. The development of the Corps was further complicated by its existence as two distinct yet entwined regiments under the same organisational umbrella: The Royal Marines Light Infantry or R.M.L.I, and the Royal Marines Artillery or R.M.A. The two bodies emerging in the nineteenth century to fulfil distinct functions invariably found themselves in competition with each other, underscoring and exacerbating the debate over the necessity of existence of the Royal Marines as a whole. This study will show that for the Marines, their constructed identity did not easily translate to a coherent mission, and that the Royal Marines in this period were frequently unable to convincingly demonstrate itself as a distinguishable and distinct enough military organisation to warrant further existence.

How this study is structured

This thesis will evaluate a wide range of sources – including letters and diaries, memoirs of Royal Marine Officers, Admiralty and War Office records, Parliamentary records, operational accounts, and early naval and military doctrinal treatises - to argue that the Royal Marines identity and organisational relevance was in a fragile state in this period, further eroded by its inability to adapt to and anticipate changes in warfare, technology, and adequately influence the trajectory of Britain's Imperial defence needs. Preceded by a detailed literature review which will seek to better frame the methodology of this thesis, the remainder will be divided as follows.

Chapters two and three will focus on Royal Marine identity. As the first substantive chapter launching the arguments of this thesis, chapter two asserts and demonstrates that the constructed identity of the Corps, both internally and externally, was in conflict with its parent service, the Royal Navy, raising further challenges to making it a distinguishable and viable organisation within Britain's military forces. It begins with a brief historical review of the Corps from its earliest origins to the present day, contextualising themes of this thesis in this brief narrative. The chapter next provides detailed analysis of the emblems and established traditions of the Corps. It also analyses the aspects of how this constructed identity also fostered tension with the Royal Navy, its parent service, and highlights the precarious nature of the Corps' identity and its organisational mission.

Chapter three examines the relative status and questions of identity through the experiences of Royal Marines. This chapter shows why service and membership in the Corps affected the relative status of Royal Marine Officers in contrast to their service peers during this period in British society. In the hierarchical strata of Britain's military and naval forces, where and how the Royal Marines were ranked and rated was of great importance to its members as well as to the organisation itself. The status of the Royal Marines as a sub-service within the Royal Navy will also be examined and show that Royal Marine Officers in particular struggled with perceptions by both the other military

services and the public of social inferiority. Using personal accounts by Marine officers and publications of the period, this chapter will show that social and financial obstacles faced by Marines were a contributing factor to the status of the Corps as an organisation. This chapter builds on my argument that the factors which influenced the constructed identity of the Corps were shaped by the marginalisation experienced by its membership in both the ranks of society and the military hierarchies.

Chapters four, five, and six focuses on the organisational development of the Royal Marines in this period. Chapter four examines the operational role of the Royal Marines in the framed period. Significant challenges faced as a consequence of technology, social upheaval, and the experiences of war, were experienced by the military services in the defined period between 1827 and 1927. This chapter examines these changes and how they promoted a new discussion over the relevance and possible disbandment of the Marines. This chapter argues the Royal Navy failed to properly innovate new uses for the Marines but demonstrates a clear lack of innovation on the part of the Marines to develop their future potential.

Chapter five examines how the Royal Marines and others within Britain's defence community from the mid-nineteenth century, envisioned the adoption of a new role for the Royal Marines. This chapter will reveal how innovative thought came into conflict with the realities of Admiralty administration. This chapter argues while new ideas were put forward, they failed to inspire change leaving the Royal Marines in a vulnerable position at the start of the First World War. It will include an analysis of what some members of the Corps saw as the best option for the operational employment within the Royal Navy, and in turn explain why these options were never fully realised in the period up through the interwar period of the early twentieth century.

Chapter six concludes the study with an examination of the operational experience of the Royal Marines during the First World War and the failed attempts to capitalise on the lessons in the early interwar period. It again demonstrates how the Corps' established reputation for loyal and faithful service failed to translate effectively to a viable and coherent mission. It will reveal how the realities of war, the administration of the Admiralty, and the parochial institutional thought of the Royal Marines leadership itself created obstacles which failed to provide any promise of future relevance for the Royal Marines, necessitating the radical changes and transformation of the Corps during the Second World War.

Chapter 1. ‘Per Mare, Per Terram’: A literature review of the Royal Marines

Richard Harding in his work detailing contemporary debates in naval history confronts the challenge and opportunities for historians in studying the Royal Marines:

Unlike the [USMC]⁵, the Royal Marines have also suffered from relative historical neglect. Before the Second World War, there were very few general histories of the corps, and those that were produced were directly linked to the campaign to preserve the Royal Marines from impending budget cuts. The Royal Marines had a range of roles within the navy and on land during the First World War, but it was the Second World War that raised the profile of the corps as specialist amphibious soldiers, which remains central to their identity to the present day. Narratives of their battles and weapons, and the individuals who served, continue to grow, but detailed analyses of operations, organizations and effectiveness are far less common.⁶

Harding accurately characterises some of the early histories of the Corps, which were indeed part of a concerted effort to both save the Corps from elimination and raise public awareness. As will be shown here, the story of the Marines has been largely written by Marines themselves in an effort to promote their own organisational narrative and to assuage its critics. This tradition has continued largely to this day, with more histories being written by the former members of the Marines as the history of the Corps continues. It will also be demonstrated further that historians, chiefly of naval history, have struggled to include the Royal Marines in their studies. More problematic is the challenge which Harding describes facing naval historians. As one reviewer has noted, the routine absence of the Royal Marines from the accounts of Royal Navy history is a historiographical reality.⁷ These challenges will be illustrated further citing some notable works and historians. Despite this, some efforts by historians have endeavoured to provide more evaluative and analytical approaches to Royal Marines history, illustrating the vast potential in researching this organisation. Finally, what will be considered is the body of work by historians who have applied methodologies and approaches in analysing similar themes and topics found in this thesis in other works on naval and military history.

The “complete histories” of the Royal Marines

The earliest histories of the Royal Marines have been written foremostly by Royal Marines. Similar in style and character, these histories provide largely chronological and general narratives of their history, while also providing some insights into the conditions experienced by its membership and observations about the relative status of the Corps to

⁵ United States Marine Corps.

⁶ Richard Harding, *Modern Naval History: Debates and Prospects*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016) 55-56

⁷ See Samuel McLean, “Review of Britt Zerbe’s: *The Birth of the Royal Marines, 1664-1802*”, *History: The Journal of the Historical Association*, 99, no. 337 (October, 2014) 690-691. McLean specifically cites the omission of the Royal Marines in naval histories as a ‘phenomenological elision’.

the other services. The earliest substantive history of the Corps was compiled by Royal Marine Major Alexander Gillespie in 1803. Gillespie cited his rationale for such a work as follows:

To drag from the land of forgetfulness, actions, long lain in oblivion; to place the revolutions and the achievements of a corps, endeared to its Country by a train of loyalty and valour, in one connected and analysed point of view, were the leading motives which urged the Author to essay a history of its origin and progress.⁸

Published within a year of the Royal Marines becoming a Royal Regiment, the dedication of the history is to the foremost patron of the Corps at this time, the Duke of Clarence, whose importance will be described in later chapters. This first history would set a precedent for histories written by a line of Marine Officers through the years at intervals, chronicling the achievements of their Corps as they unfolded. The next such major work written by a Marine Officer is that of Lieutenant Paul Harris Nicolas' 1845 book, *Historical Records of the Royal Marine Forces*, who cites his reasons for writing his history:

...influenced by a strong attachment to the welfare and reputation of the corps, in which I had the honour to serve, I felt persuaded that an impartial account of the services of the Royal Marines would not only reflect additional lustre on their distinguished character, but encourage a spirit of emulation, which is the strongest impulse to great and gallant actions; and as nothing can so fully tend to this desirable object as a faithful record of their glorious career.⁹

Here again, the conviction is made plain by the author to relate the deeds of his Corps and regiment to the reader. Another early history of the Marines detailed the Corps history, published as a part of a wider collection of army regimental histories.¹⁰ Compiled by Richard Cannon, an army clerk at Horse Guards in 1837, this short history relied primarily on the earlier published histories by Gillespie for source material. The utility of this work, however, does serve to reinforce the lineage of British maritime regiments as part of the established army, and before they passed to control of the Admiralty in 1755.¹¹ As such, the history marked the place the Royal Marines inhabited within the British military hierarchy, and specifically in relation to the other regiments of the British army to which the marines found themselves most often compared.

Another history in the late century by Major L. Edye published in 1893, would again echo the desires of his forebears to bring the Corps history to the forefront of the public mind. Edye felt a new history of the Royal Marines, "was urged upon him that it was his duty to

⁸ Alexander Gillespie, *An historical review of the Royal Marine Corps: from its original institution down to the present era, 1803* (Birmingham: Mr. Swinney, Printer, 1803) ix.

⁹ Paul H. Nicolas, *Historical Records of the Royal Marine Forces*, Vol. I (London: Thomas and William Boone, 1845) viii.

¹⁰ Richard Cannon, Esq., *Historical Record of the Marine Corps*, (London: Parker, Furnivall and Parker, 1837)

¹¹ Cannon, *Historical Record*, 51.

go back to the earliest times, and, taking the widest possible view of his subject”, in his effort to illustrate the services of soldiers embarked on ships.¹² The purpose of this new history according to Edye was to, “rescue from forgetfulness the origin, the changes, the trials and the triumphs of a corps to which he is proud to belong, and which should be endeared to his countrymen by its unflinching loyalty and the valour of its deeds”.¹³ His history, like the others, was meant to revive the glorious past and “inspire the unknown future”.¹⁴ Though originally advertised as a two volume history, a second volume was never compiled or published.

The two volume history of the Corps, *Sea Soldiers*, by Colonel Cyril Field was published in 1924.¹⁵ Field’s imperative for the writing of a new work about the Royal Marine history, was to show “how the Royal Marines and their ancestors have acquitted themselves in the many and varied operations of warfare by sea and by land which have fallen to their lot.”¹⁶ Field also noted that following the First World War, “the ‘proverbial man in the street’ has but the vaguest notion of what a Marine is”, and that the Corps’ exploits were lost within the grander narratives of the ‘Naval Brigades’.¹⁷ As Field recounted, “..the General Public has got into the way of thinking of the personnel of the Navy in terms of “sailors” only, and even when a Naval Brigade, composed of seamen *and* Marines, is landed for service on shore few people realise the share the latter have in the operations.”¹⁸ Field, like his predecessor Edye, was concerned that following the epic global struggle of the First World War, the laurels and achievements attributed to the Corps’ contribution were lost to the public.¹⁹ This new work was intended to set the record straight and emphasise the importance of the Royal Marines following the First World War, yet omitted a chapter on the late war. Work on this additional volume to accompany Field’s work was taken up instead by General Herbert Edward Blumberg in *Britain’s Sea Soldiers – A Record of the Royal Marines During the War 1914-1919*.²⁰ Blumberg also wrote two other earlier histories of the Royal Marines, covering the earliest maritime regiments up to the First World War but were never published. All these works preceding Blumberg have at least one unifying theme which rings plainly beyond the conviction to broadcast the achievements of the Corps. As a sub-set of the Royal Navy these marines expressed a sense of marginalisation by its members in contrast to the other services.

¹² Major L. Edye, *The Historical Records of the Royal Marines, 1664-1701*, Vol. I (London: Harrison and Sons, 1893) vii.

¹³ Edye, *Historical Records*, viii.

¹⁴ Edye, viii.

¹⁵ Cyril Field, *Britain’s Sea-Soldiers, Vol. I & II*, (Liverpool: The Lyceum Press, 1924)

¹⁶ Field, *Sea Soldiers, Vol. I*, i.

¹⁷ Field, i.

¹⁸ Field, i.

¹⁹ Field, i.

²⁰ Blumberg’s account is a compilation of extensive notes and manuscripts he put together about the Marine history which are still held by the Royal Marines Museum, Eastney. He died before they were published in H. E. Blumberg, *Britain’s Sea Soldiers – A Record of the Royal Marines During the War 1914-1919* (Devonport: Swiss, 1927).

Useful as both primary sources on the Royal Marines, but also containing critiques of the organisational nature of the Corps, these early histories are foundational blocks of the historiography of the Royal Marines as so many historians since have drawn from these. These early histories related the achievements of the Corps and contain the convictions of their authors, many notably themselves Royal Marines. As histories compiled chiefly by officers who serve within the stated period of this research, the authors themselves served as witnesses and therefore a source of information about this era; their biases and convictions come through as voices to this period. Their sentiments and testimonies will serve to accentuate further discussion of the subject areas which will be studied in further detail in later chapters. While these early volumes were certainly intended with Marines as a key audience for consumption, the tone of these earliest histories retain at least two palpable threads expressed in these volumes. Firstly, to promote the continued relevance and necessity of the Royal Marines in the British armed forces. Secondly, a desire to convey the deeds and value of the Royal Marines to the general public. All these histories had within them, a clearly stated agenda of justifying to the military and public at large why the Royal Marines should continue to exist. Consequently, these histories are varnished and lack objectivity, with some of the more unpleasant aspects of their service record left largely unexamined, such as their role in the Great Mutinies or in colonial campaigns. Despite these problems, the early histories provide a useful repository for information about the origins of the Corps and its history.

A modest complete regimental history was completed in the post-war period since the creation of the Commandos was by Major General Moulton. Moulton, who entered the Marines in 1924, experienced the transition of the Corps to the Commandos. His short volume, *The Royal Marines*, provides a brief but useful chronological survey from 1664 to 1970.²¹ It is noteworthy as a narrative for its inclusion of insights into the Commando transition and the trials faced by the Corps in self-preservation in the post-war era and the early stages of the Cold War. Of those written since the Second World War, two stand out in particular. Firstly, James D. Ladd's *By Land, By Sea: The Royal Marines, 1919-1997*.²² With the 1983 Falklands War being a major event for the Royal Marines which raised their profile significantly, as well as the Persian Gulf War of 1991, both are covered in the later edition. The book concerns primarily the history of the Commandos, so the period from 1919-1940 is covered sparsely in a single twenty-page chapter. Detailed and well researched, the utility of Ladd's work remains a definitive and comprehensive chronology

²¹ J.L Moulton, *The Royal Marines*, (London: Leo Cooper, Ltd, 1972).

²² An earlier edition covering 1919 to 1980 and missed the Falklands, a key event in modern Royal Marines history, a second volume included this, along with the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War which saw the deployment of the entire 3rd Commando Brigade. James D. Ladd, *By Land, By Sea: The Royal Marines, 1919-1997 – An Authorised History*, (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998).

of the Commando years, which as one reviewer has described, serves as a 'fourth volume' to the works of Field and Blumberg.²³

The other notable Corps history, written with a specific focus on the Corps' commando transition in the twentieth century, was written by retired Royal Marines Major General Julian Thompson, *The Royal Marines: From Sea Soldiers to a Special Force*.²⁴ The work of Thompson is most significant as a continuation of the historical work about the Royal Marines written by a Royal Marine, which probes the questions around Royal Marine identity with a keen analytical and interpretative approach to evaluating the Corps' history with a highly experienced insider's perspective.²⁵ The overall focus of his work is the evaluation of the transitions of the twentieth century Royal Marines to the Royal Marines Commandos. Similar to Ladd, Thompson includes only two short chapters out of twenty-six covering on the Royal Marines before the First World War.²⁶ Long having considered themselves a distinct apart from the Royal Navy, Thompson argues that although the current Corps is the direct descendant of its pre-1941 ancestors, those Marines would hardly recognise the Royal Marine Commandos since World War II.²⁷ Thompson has emphasised that the Marines were spared disbandment by embracing the opportunity to help shape and define British amphibious doctrine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then developing and retaining the commando mission adopted during the Second World War which ultimately saved the Royal Marines from perdition.²⁸ He also touches on the subject of Royal Marine identity, highlighting the challenges of social acceptability and mobility for Royal Marine officers.²⁹ For the purposes of this study, Thompson's account cites an important instance of the malleability and mutability of organisational culture and identity. Namely, the Royal Marine identity was something that evolved over time from "soldiers gone to sea" to an elite commando force. Contrary to Thompson, this thesis will argue the Royal Marines had more difficulties in directly influencing amphibious doctrine in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is an argument then that transformation to the Commandos was essential, saved by the adoption of a new mission and purpose, saving the Royal Marines from a chronic cycle of disbandment experienced in times of post-war budgetary constraints.

The most recent and ambitious attempt by Richard Brooks chronicles the extensive Royal Marine history and is worth mentioning here: *The Royal Marines, 1664 to the Present*.³⁰

This volume was to be, in part, an extension of his earlier work, *The Long Arms of Empire*:

²³ Don Bittner, "Book Reviews", *The Journal of Military History*, 68, no. 1 (January 2004), 302-304.

²⁴ Julian Thompson, *The Royal Marines: From Sea Soldiers to a Special Force*, (London: Pan Books, 2001).

²⁵ Thompson is well known in the Royal Marines for having led 3rd Commando Brigade during the Falklands War.

²⁶ Thompson's history of the Royal Marines includes only forty-three pages addressing Corps history from 1664 to 1914, a deliberate emphasis in his thesis focused on the transformative key events of the 20th century which precipitated the Corps' transition to the Commandos of today.

²⁷ Thompson, *The Royal Marines*, 2-3.

²⁸ Thompson, 590-591.

²⁹ Thompson, 16-19, 42-43.

³⁰ Richard Brooks, *The Royal Marines: 1664 to the present* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2002).

Naval Brigades from the Crimea to the Boxer Rebellion.³¹ Brooks primarily focuses on the centuries through World War I, with nine of twelve chapters devoted to the pre-1919 events and personalities of the Royal Marines history, in order “to provide the context missing from the wealth of books that focus exclusively on Commandos”.³² His work also advertises a “first single volume study of the Royal Marines’ history as a whole”.³³ Brooks’ discussion on the nineteenth century Marines is constrained in part by his focus on this chronological approach to the history of the Corps, leaving him able to only allude to some of the social issues of the day experienced by marines. A chronological approach which attempts to compact 350 years of history into one volume leaves little room to provide further details on other subject areas which again highlights the challenge in compiling such a long organizational history. Outside of these works, naval historians have otherwise only tacitly engaged with the Royal Marines.

Some challenges and successes in studying the Marines as approached by naval historians

In the past sixty years, naval and military history has seen a wider interest from historians with a departure from once more traditional chronological narratives, studies of important military figures, and works on naval and military strategy. This new analytical focus has included works on social history and examinations of military organisations. The Royal Marines, however, have largely remained on the periphery of these studies, where discussion or even mention of marines is often brief or anecdotal, and often used to highlight or punctuate other themes and subjects. Studies devoted to the study of the Royal Marines have not only been few, but their examination has also posed challenges for some historians. The experience of the Royal Marines has been frequently subsumed and obfuscated under the broader narratives of naval history, as well as the specific studies which have revealed new aspects on the study of the Royal Navy and the British Empire. Some historians have blatantly excluded them in their approaches, others have acknowledged their existence without probing much further. A few examples of how historians have included or excluded marines puts this problem in focus.

Michael Lewis in *England’s Sea Officers*, surveys the officers who served on the naval ships from the earliest traceable years of the Royal Navy to the early twentieth-century.³⁴ Written in 1939 using extensive records from the Admiralty, Lewis examines each role of the Royal Navy’s ships officers by profession and rank in turn, yet skips over the Marine officer entirely. The notable exception is his appraisal of the ill-fated Selborne scheme which sought to redefine naval officer training in the early twentieth century, and only

³¹ Richard Brooks, *The Long Arms of Empire: Naval Brigades from the Crimea to the Boxer Rebellion* (London: Constable & Robinson, 1999).

³² Brooks, *The Royal Marines*, 1.

³³ Brooks, 1-2.

³⁴ Michael Lewis, *England’s Sea Officers*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1939).

there does he note the attempt to subsume the role of the Marine officer entirely within the navy.³⁵ Nicholas Rodger extensively covers the Georgian Royal Navy in his organisational histories, but these include little about the Marines. An example of Rodger's cursory inclusion of the marines in his work *The Wooden World*, built almost exclusively from Admiralty records sources, where Rodger summarises the early marines with this phrase: "[Marines] were taught to handle a musket, and expected to fight ashore if landing parties were needed, but they were certainly at least as ill-trained as the average British foot-soldier of the day."³⁶ Rodger's work is devoid of any real inclusion of marines in the Royal Navy, and this unfortunate statement, which reduces at a stroke any hope of the Marines benefitting from any further critical analysis. Yet, the Royal Marines were part of the 'anatomy' of the navy and they were an unavoidable and highly visible facet of the Royal Navy's rhythms at sea and the Royal Dockyards. Rodger's exclusivity of chosen source material, drawn chiefly from Admiralty records, likewise fails to add much in the way of any social dimension to the personages which shaped these organisations. The example of such works as these mentioned by Lewis and Rodger, fail to consider the possibility of examining the Marines in a new way. Lewis' works, however, can be credited and praised as early efforts at widening the examination of a traditional military subject, the Royal Navy, into that of social and cultural history. Rodger, however, is an avowed critic of such efforts.³⁷ Brian Lavery has extensively examined the 'lower deck' of the Royal Navy in *Royal Tars, The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 875 -1850*, and in *Able Seamen, The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy 1850-1939*, investigating the daily lives of sailors.³⁸ Lavery defines the lower deck as, "a group of men (and later women) who perform the essential tasks of any navy", and refines his description further around defining characteristics such as skill specialisation and the segregation of sailors and officers.³⁹ Lavery, however, admittedly omits discussion of marines in any great detail in either of these volumes. In *Royal Tars*, Lavery states, "[marines] deserve a history of their own", while tacitly acknowledging "how essential [marines] were to running a ship", and important in so far as "the history of the navy and battles".⁴⁰ In his companion volume *Able Seamen*, Lavery again cites the absence of the 'common seaman' from traditional naval history, but once again states that his work does not deal with the Royal Marines in any detail.⁴¹ Although set in the Napoleonic era, Lavery's earlier work on *Nelson's Navy* provides only a very short, but also the most extensive, chapter of all his works to the treatment and discussion

³⁵ Lewis, *England's Sea Officers*, 114-119.

³⁶ N.A.M Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*, (London: Fontana, 1988) 28.

³⁷ Don Leggett. "Navy, nation and identity in the long nineteenth century", *Journal for Maritime Research*, Vol. 13, no. 2 (2011), 152.

³⁸ Brian Lavery's two volumes on daily life in the Royal Navy, makes few references to the Marines, Brian Lavery, *Royal Tars: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 875 -1850*, (London: Conway, 2010) and Brian Lavery, *Able Seamen, The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy 1850-1939* (London: Conway, 2011).

³⁹ Lavery, *Royal Tars*, 11.

⁴⁰ Lavery, 13-14.

⁴¹ Lavery, *Able Seamen*, 11.

of marines.⁴² Despite marines living and working in the lower deck spaces he was defining, Lavery found the meshing of marines to his study problematic in his social histories of the navy. Ambiguities on the nature of the space where marines work, such as the juxtaposition of the space they exist in geographically on both land and sea, or whether they must be defined further as a naval entity, or land combat organisation like the army. We may conclude that Lavery struggled in trying to fit marines into the framework of his own treatises of the Royal Navy. The Royal Marines have therefore defied a satisfactory definition for some naval historians as certain challenges arise with examining marines alongside sailors. Others have met the challenge with greater success. As will be discussed at length in later chapters, defining Marines in the context of the navy is further complicated by the fact that Marines self-identify as being members of a thing apart.⁴³

Other historians have deliberately focused on the Royal Marines with greater success but have also recognised these challenges. Don Bittner, a historian who has written extensively on Royal Marines history, has drawn a similar conclusion to Richard Harding on the present state of Royal Marines historiography: “the Royal Marines still do not have a definitive analytical and interpretative institutional history similar to Allan Millet's *Semper Fidelis*⁴⁴ for the United States Marine Corps. For a service with a long and complicated history, founded in 1664, producing such a work would be a formidable challenge requiring dedication, time, and resources.”⁴⁵ Despite this admission, Bittner is foremost in this new tradition for advancing our understanding of the Royal Marine identity by examining the Corps from an organisational and social lens, especially through his case studies of the careers and lives of notable Royal Marines officers. In *Officers of the Royal Marines in the age of sail: professional and personal life in His and Her Majesty's soldiers of the sea*, Bittner evaluates the period of Corps history of the 1790s to the 1850s.⁴⁶ Using a vast collection of correspondence and diaries from five Marine officers for source material, Bittner advances our understanding of the relative status of the Corps and the precarious nature of the careers and livelihoods of Marine officers. Two further works by Bittner advance our understanding of the themes concerned in this thesis. Bittner's “*Shattered Images*”, examines the social origins and career dilemmas faced by officers of the Royal Marines from 1867 to 1914.⁴⁷ In detail, this work unpacks and analyses the myriad of troubles faced by Marine officers in their finances, promotion and career prospects. Bittner concluded that Royal Marine officers in this period were largely made

⁴² Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy: Ships, Men and Organisation, 1793-1815* (London: Conway, 1989) 145-156.

⁴³ Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 2.

⁴⁴ Allan Millet, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (Revised and Expanded Edition) (New York: The Free Press, 1991)

⁴⁵ Don Bittner, “Book Reviews”, *The Journal of Military History*, 68, no. 1 (January, 2004) 302-304.

⁴⁶ Donald F. Bittner, *Officers of the Royal Marines in the age of sail: professional and personal life in His and Her Majesty's soldiers of the sea*, Royal Marines Historical Society, special publication 26, (Portsmouth: Royal Marines Historical Society, 2002).

⁴⁷ Donald F. Bittner, “Shattered Images”, *The Journal of Military History*, 59, no.1 (January, 1995) 27-51.

up of men from middle-class families seeking careers which were socially acceptable, of value to British society, and provided a degree of economic sustenance.⁴⁸ In “*Britannia's Sheathed Sword: The Royal Marines and Amphibious Warfare in the Interwar Years - A Passive Response*”, Bittner analyses the state of the Royal Marines at the conclusion of the First World War and their struggle to define a coherent mission.⁴⁹ Bittner argues that despite a vast repository of experience in the Royal Marines following the First World War, especially in the developing area of amphibious warfare, the Corps did little to innovate or hinge their future on a definitive role.⁵⁰ Bittner concluded that while Britain in the interwar years between 1918 and 1940 did not abandon development of an amphibious doctrine, budget constraints, split views within the Corps on the proper role for the Marines, and a narrow view within the Royal Navy on retaining the Marines in traditional roles failed to significantly advance it.⁵¹ Finally, Bittner’s expert editing and contextual commentary of the memoirs of Lieutenant Colonel Charles Frederick Jerram, offers a valuable insight into the life of a serving Royal Marine officer from the end of the Victorian through the Second World War.⁵² The collective body of work by Bittner, which is referenced liberally in this thesis, represents some of the best critical evaluation and analysis to date beyond traditional narrative with further evaluation of the organisational and cultural history of the Royal Marines.

A recent and valuable contribution to the expanding examination of the Royal Marines in naval historiography is that of Britt Zerbe in *The Birth of the Royal Marines, 1664-1802*.⁵³ Zerbe examines the operational doctrine and identity of the Royal Marines in its earliest years, while also arguing that “the creation of an operational doctrine and identity”, was key to the success of the marines in this period.⁵⁴ Zerbe’s further aims included, “an examination of an eighteenth century military force’s creation of an operational doctrine, which would justify its purpose for existence and its place in the British military pantheon.”⁵⁵ These themes explored by Zerbe are closely aligned to this study and taken up where Zerbe leaves off in 1802 into the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Building on these themes, certain conclusions asserted by Zerbe are disputed here as they apply to the scope of this study and require further scrutiny.

Zerbe in his analysis concluded that the Royal Marine identity was achieved in 1802 when the marines became a Royal Regiment: “the Marine Corps had a new level of identity, official acceptance and [professional/honourable] equality with the Royal Navy and the

⁴⁸ Bittner, “Shattered Images”, 51.

⁴⁹ Donald F. Bittner, “Britannia’s Sheathed Sword: The Royal Marines and Amphibious Warfare in the Interwar Years - A Passive Response”, *The Journal of Military History*, 55, no. 3 (July 1991) 345-364.

⁵⁰ Bittner, “Britannia’s Sheathed Sword”, 363.

⁵¹ Bittner, 363.

⁵² Charles Frederick Jerram, *A Soldier Gone to Sea: Memoir of a Royal Marine in Both World Wars*, edited by Donald F. Bittner, (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2016).

⁵³ Britt Zerbe, *The Birth of the Royal Marines, 1664-1802*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013)

⁵⁴ Zerbe, *The Birth of the Royal Marines*, 254.

⁵⁵ Zerbe, 2.

Royal Regiments of the Army.”⁵⁶ Zerbe asserts a definitive establishment of a unique organisational identity by the Royal Marines as their date of accession to a Royal Regiment in 1802:

Over their forty-seven years’ formation before being made Royal, marines came to be seen as a vital constitutional element by the public. They were also the ideal symbol of amphibiousness even taking it to its fullest extent, making them identifiable with the nation as a whole. In the end the Marine Corps and many of its personnel were no longer to be seen as inferiors or hindrances to the Navy and its personnel but instead as a vital aspect of the Navy’s abilities to project power. By 1802 the establishment of the Royal Marines’ signified that this forty-seven-year process of construction was finally complete.⁵⁷

Zerbe’s conclusions on the Royal Marines do not survive beyond 1802. The Corps could indeed celebrate the achievement of new royal regiment status, and this a defining moment. While the marines were always part of the Royal Navy and free to construct and develop their own unique identity, the identity created by the Marines did more to hinder their organisation as they later argued for their retention. This in turn created a culture of ingrained institutional paranoia over their possible extinction which continues to the present day. The marginalisation of the Corps continued in the long decades which followed. Even today, the Royal Marines are not identified as a distinct separate service, but as an organisation or formation within a service. This study will also show why the Marine identity was established, in the decades to come it was far from secure and grappled with the public consciousness. This thesis argues that despite any public recognition, the Corps identity far from being complete or well established, remained on precarious ground and in a fragile state throughout the nineteenth century into the twentieth century. This fragile identity in turn hindered real progress towards defining a coherent mission and eventually necessitated the radical reorganisation of the Royal Marines which occurred in the mid-twentieth century to ensure its survival.

Zerbe also links the Royal Marine’s identity to their construction of an amphibious doctrine, which Zerbe asserts assured their existence and purpose:

The Marine’s identity and doctrine was built at its core on the inherent flexibility of amphibiousness. The Marine Corps could change rapidly to fulfil any strategic needs of the country because there was no overriding single purpose for their existence. This rapidity of change is something Marines are still known for to this day. When the [3 April 1755] Order in Council came for the formation of a Corps of Marines no one had this in mind, but by 29 April 1802 this amphibious body was perceived as a

⁵⁶ Zerbe, *The Birth of the Royal Marines*, 256.

⁵⁷ Zerbe, 254.

vital arm of the British strategic military capability. Marine operational doctrine and identity directly facilitated this organisation's ability to continually adapt to the growing demands of the Navy and Nation.⁵⁸

This conclusion of Zerbe's, as will be shown, is in direct conflict of the realities faced by the Corps in the late nineteenth century and also in the years of the First World War and interwar period where amphibious doctrine remained an abstract topic and was not a defined role for the Corps. The Marines were also not as inherently flexible as Zerbe suggests and that it was precisely the absence of a single identifiable and relevant purpose which proved a great inhibitor to their continued existence. This study will show why continued utility of the Marines was challenged and eroded over time and that rather than being innovative, the Corps was reactive with change forced upon it and complete extinction avoided only by timely interventions. Zerbe's further assertions on the utility and purpose in the long eighteenth century established the Royal Marines as an essential component of the Royal Navy are stated as follows:

[the Marines] developed the purpose and training regime to solidify their very existence. This operational doctrine was never to be placed in one document nor done by a single person. Instead the doctrine was an amalgamation of ideas, published materials, training strategies and combat experiences throughout this period. The system shows over this period in a growing development of an overarching doctrine for action on land and at sea. Marines possessed an incredible amount of operational flexibility for the eighteenth-century military institution. In battles or campaigns marines could be formed into special battalions for key land operations or the units on various naval ships could be used in a variety of mixed sized force operations. They were used as a mobile reserve force that could attack strategic areas or work as a tactical diversion before the main strike on another area. Ultimately, this flexibility and multi-dimensional aspects of their operational doctrine enhanced the Marines' own sense of their amphibious military identity.⁵⁹

In fact, it was the lack of a coherent doctrine and a clear mission which was a root cause of the existential impediments faced by the Royal Marines in the decades to come. Zerbe has suggested that in the early operations of the British Empire, principally in the eighteenth century, the Marines served as an important link for the army and the navy, "because of the amphibious nature of the Marines, they could provide the ever increasingly important operational bridge for these two organisations upon sea and land".⁶⁰ The Royal Marines not only failed to provide this seemingly logical bridge between the army and the navy, but also were internally conflicted by this prospect as incompatible

⁵⁸ Zerbe, *The Birth of the Royal Marines*, 263.

⁵⁹ Zerbe, 13.

⁶⁰ Zerbe, 207.

with their own purpose and mission. Ultimately, as will be shown, it was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that better planning and synergy between the army and navy was necessary, with the Royal Marines increasingly aware that failure to define a contributing mission might spell their demise. Contrary to Zerbe's conclusions, further evidence will demonstrate that Britain's global empire domination through seapower defied the need for a comprehensive doctrine for amphibious operations in the decades that followed, denying the opportunity for the Royal Marines to champion or innovate developments much later in this emerging naval doctrine. While several of Zerbe's conclusions as to the origins of British amphibious doctrine within the Royal Marines are disputed in this study, Zerbe's work remains an essential volume for historians seeking to expand their study and a useful method to introduce the next segment of this historiographical evaluation.

There exists then an opportunity for further contributions in the expanding field of social, cultural, and organisational history which has explores military subjects from new approaches. The need to produce these new histories also underscores the opportunity for historians, as noted by Harding and Bittner, to move beyond the exclusively chronological and campaign histories and explore other opportunities in researching the Royal Marines. What follows is further explanation on how this thesis will approach the rich opportunity for historians in further study of the Marines. Using the two-part approach outlined in the introduction, this thesis will build on some of the best recent scholarship by historians concerning the social and organisational history of the Royal Marines, and also approaches and methodologies by other scholars and historians that will aid this study.

A proposed method to examine the Royal Marines: identity and organisational development

In the past few decades, serious exploration of naval and military topics has migrated from battle studies and the studies of great leaders or heroes. Once viewed as a vehicle for imperial nostalgia and a device instructing military officers, military and naval history has become a topic for serious research by historians, and studies have rapidly proliferated. The relationship between British society and its military forces has been the subject and focus for historians in recent years, with the primary emphasis in scholarship and research accorded to the army and to the navy using social and cultural approaches to history in order to deepen our understanding of these services.⁶¹ Termed as 'new military history'

⁶¹ Some of the best research conducted on the British Army in this period includes Edward Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army: 1868-1914*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) and *The Army and Society: 1815-1914*, (London: Longman Group Limited, 1980). Ian F.W. Beckett provided a comprehensive examination of the role and contribution of the reserves and militia in *Britain's Part-Time Soldiers*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991). For an examination of race and masculinity in military culture in the British Empire, Heather Streets, *Martial races: The military, race and masculinity in British imperial culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). Mary Conley examined the relationship between the Royal Navy and British society in *Jack Tar to Union Jack, representing naval manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009) and Margarette Lincoln in *Representing the Royal Navy: British Seapower, 1750-1815*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

and 'new naval history', when characterised more broadly, many of these studies enter the category of the still growing examination of 'war and society' studies.⁶² As Don Leggett has cited, these developments have provided greater accessibility and interaction with naval history for historians in a wider landscape, with greater capacity for ongoing research agendas in maritime and imperial history, making possible a fuller study of the role of the navy in Britain's maritime empire.⁶³ Essentially, the aims of these studies are the 'de-militarisation' of military and naval history, focusing instead on combatants and their experiences, military culture and identity, race, civilian populations, or in geographic terms.⁶⁴ This study will examine the Royal Marines as an organisational sub-set of the Royal Navy, or their organisational history, and their unique military identity. The two themes are interconnected. What follows is how some historians have engaged with this successfully and how their ideas and methods can be incorporated in this study.

An organisational approach

As Richard Harding has argued, "navies can be studied as organizations that were the most complex of their time".⁶⁵ How navies, armies, or for the purpose of this study, a regiment such as the Royal Marines operated encompasses both the issues of identity and how these organisations functioned. Specific to the idea of organisational history, navies are organizations created by the state for the purposes of implementing a national strategy.⁶⁶ The availability of a vast archive of administrative documents for interpretation, coupled with more personal manuscripts from individual serving members, makes the study of these organisations an intriguing opportunity for historians. The Royal Marines are a sub-organization of the Royal Navy, but one which has seen limited study by naval historians. Military organisations cultivate their own unique cultural habits and customs. The British army, for example, has persistently propagated the importance of regimental

⁶² The term 'new military history', describing the shift of the study of the military and military history by historians in the past fifty years, has seen frequent use to describe this shift towards cultural and social histories, also known as "war and society". For a detailed examination of this, see Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004) and for an extensive critique of Black see Mark Moyer, "The Current State of Military History", *The Historical Journal*, 50, no.1 (March 2007), 225-240. For discussion of naval history in the same context, see Richard Harding, *Modern Naval History: Debates and Prospects*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), and Don Leggett. "Navy, nation and identity in the long nineteenth century", *Journal for Maritime Research*, 13, no. 2 (2011), 151-163. See also Knight "Changing the Agenda: The 'new' naval history of the British sailing navy", *The Mariner's Mirror*, 225-242. Knight cites the emergence in the 1950s of a departure from the traditional examination of naval history with a strategic and operational naval outlook, to a new focus on a wider maritime history to include assessments of naval strength and weakness in terms of politics, economics, administration, materiel and manpower, state credit and technological development, as well as prize money and privateering. This approach has also embraced social histories, including the "below decks" studies, such as those aforementioned by Brian Lavery, examining daily lives of ordinary sailors.

⁶³ Don Leggett. "Navy, nation and identity in the long nineteenth century", *Journal for Maritime Research*, 13, no. 2 (2011), 152.

⁶⁴ For an example of this new approach in the examination of experiences of combatants, see *Britain's soldiers: rethinking war and society, 1715-1815*, edited by Kevin Linch and Matthew McCormack, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014); for culture and identity see David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, c. 1870-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Mary Conley *Jack Tar to Union Jack, representing naval manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009) and Margarete Lincoln in *Representing the Royal Navy: British Seapower, 1750-1815*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); for military and naval studies examining race and masculinity in the British Empire, see Heather Streets, *Martial races: The military, race and masculinity in British imperial culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) and Ray Costello, *Black Salt: Seafarers of African Descent on British Ships*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012).

⁶⁵ Harding, *Modern Naval History*, 10.

⁶⁶ Harding, 116.

identities as significant to efficiency and the function of the army as a whole.⁶⁷ Ultimately, these discussions and beliefs exact an important influence on decisions which result in significant outlays of government spending and the organisation around defence needs with all their ramifications.

Historians Heather Venable and Terry Terriff have examined how one similar military organisation evolved and solved the problem of their own existential crisis. Examining the US Marine Corps in the same time period as this study, Venable in her organisational study of the US Marine Corps, examines how this organisation under similar pressures as the Royal Marines of redundancy and extinction, were forced to construct its own elite image.⁶⁸ Venable's argues that marines of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century could not claim a clearly defined mission within the American defence establishment, necessitating a public relations and advertising campaign to promote an image of marines as more elite and disciplined than soldiers, and more masculine than sailors and "out-soldiering soldiers". Venable demonstrates how the Marine Corps used its history of amphibious landings to align these activities to idealised martial masculinities and produce through their own Publicity Bureau, a range of printed posters and news stories which captured the public imagination. The deliberate engendering of the marine landing party was designed to inform the public that navy sailors were less manly in comparison. Venable's argues that the US Marine Corps continued existence in this period was made possible by both success on the battlefield and a deliberate campaign of a constructed masculine identity in American society through advertising and public relations.⁶⁹ The success of this campaign was considerable. As a result, Terry Terriff has shown how the US Marine Corps inculcated the same belief into its membership to the extent that a myth about the US Marines was created: "...in terms of cold mechanical logic, the United States does not need a Marine Corps. However, for good reasons which completely transcend cold logic, the United States wants a Marine Corps."⁷⁰ Terriff argues this statement has become the foundation of a mythological bond believed to exist between the people of the United States and the US Marine Corps.⁷¹ For the purposes of this study, there will be no comparative study of the Royal Marines to other similar marine organisations. As will be shown, unlike the US Marine Corps who at a similar crisis point following the First World War experienced a crisis regarding its organisational future, the Royal Marines failed to adapt and innovate in the same way as their American peers. The also did not achieve, as

⁶⁷ See David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, c. 1870-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶⁸ Heather Venable, *How the Few Became the Proud: Crafting the Marine Corps Mystique, 1874-1918*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019).

⁶⁹ Venable, *How the Few Became the Proud*, 13, 147.

⁷⁰ Marine Corps Archives, letter of Krulak to Pate, 4 November 1957, 5. This letter was reprinted by Krulak in his critical evaluation of US Marine Corps history in: Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1984).

⁷¹ Terry Terriff, "Innovate or die: Organizational culture and the origins of maneuver warfare in the United States Marine Corps", *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no. 3, (June 2006), 482-483.

stated by Terriff, the same mythological status in the British psyche despite their martial achievements. Yet, the Royal Marines inspired the creation of similar military bodies abroad, and in turn, as will be shown, drew from lessons and the practices of foreign militaries such as the US Marine Corps. As will be explained, the organisational structure of the Royal Marines as a sub-set of the Royal Navy or fighting arm, complicated their ability to push their agenda and was further inhibited by the lack of senior Marine officers in the upper echelons of the Admiralty.

David French has critically examined the evolution of the regimental system of the British army and demonstrated the value of further study of military unit identities stating: “An economist might not recognize a regiment as a unit of production, and so the immediate relevance of the test, a proven ability to produce and distribute the goods and services deemed necessary to meet its basic needs, might be difficult to apply. But regiments were required to produce a service, success on the battlefield.”⁷² From this statement, we can understand how the cold hard fiscal realities of budget considerations, weighed the merits and contributions of one service against another; the reams of the Hansard army and navy estimates over the centuries attest to this. Added to this are the problems of how effectiveness is measured, and where units or ships are considered in like for like fashion, what discriminating factors can distinguish the merits or demerits for each are harder to come by. This is especially true, as will be shown for the Royal Marines. The Royal Marines experienced an organisational crisis where their function and utility were questioned and deemed no longer valuable. As a sub-organisation of the Royal Navy defined around specific tasks and roles, the Royal Marines were forced to evolve or face disbandment. The additional point of friction was the unique identity which they had crafted, as argued here very much on an incompatible model of a British army regiment.

Examining culture and Identity: building a case for the Royal Marines

Management consultant and business analyst Peter Drucker is known for having stated “culture eats strategy for breakfast”.⁷³ The saying suggests that any organisation embarking on a set task or organisation changes will invariably be guided or driven by its own institutional culture, practices and traditions. Drucker’s argument claims the ethos, values, and ethics which employees share ultimately guides the direction an organisation will take far more than any strategy that does not take these cultural influences into account. Defining culture, however, proves elusive for scholars of many disciplines

⁷² David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, c. 1870-2000*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 339.

⁷³ The exact origins of this quotation, or its precise attribution to Peter Drucker are problematic, but the quotation as an example of sage business and management knowledge is widely used and interpreted; Boris Groysberg, Jeremiah Lee, Jesse Price, and J. Yo-Jud Cheng, “The Leader’s Guide to Corporate Culture”, *Harvard Business Review*, January - February 2018, accessed 3.3.2019 from: <https://hbr.org/2018/01/the-culture-factor>; Rick Torben, “Organization Culture Eats “Strategy for Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner”, 11 June 2014. Accessed 3 March 2019 from: <https://www.torbenrick.eu/blog/culture/organisational-culture-eats-strategy-for-breakfast-lunch-and-dinner/>.

despite its prolific use.⁷⁴ Management scholar Mats Alverson suggests that 'organisational culture', and especially the term 'culture' itself has no fixed or broadly used meaning, even in anthropology; it is a tricky concept, used to cover everything and consequently nothing.⁷⁵ Among sociologists and business analysts, there remains a wide range of opinions on the definition of interpretation of the term 'organisational culture'.⁷⁶ This thesis uses the term in speaking, from a historical perspective, about how the Royal Marines as a military organisation have taken a serious interest in the creation and interpretation of those events, ideas, and experiences that were influenced and shaped by its members, and how its membership derived a shared identity, a sense of purpose, and a common set of beliefs. This thesis also uses the term identity to derive a better understanding of what membership in the Royal Marines mean to its contemporaries. Studies have increased examining aspects of military organisations using the terms identity and culture to argue the case for further study. Both terms require further explanation on how these are used by historians, especially in the study of military organisations and how they will be utilised in this thesis.

This study also proposes that to better understand the challenges faced by the Royal Marines through their existence as a military organisation, it is important to better understand the challenges they faced in constructing their own identity. As Peter Wilson has cited, the cultural dimension of military organisations is frequently lost or subsumed in the pursuit of other debates.⁷⁷ In essence, these studies seek to understand in part how military organisations develop, not only as their own culture, but in the course of asserting their relevance and utility, how they gain their own recognisable identity.⁷⁸ Donald Bittner has cited how Royal Marines officers, in contrast to their army peers in this same period, came from more humble and frequently more impoverished backgrounds.⁷⁹ Marines were also members of an overarching military hierarchy, dictated in part by the stratified characteristics of British society of the period, imposing complex issues of status and seniority between services. For officers, this facet of their existence was on public display through the respective army and navy lists, as well as the *London Gazette*, and membership in the Marines in a society fixated on familial origins and decorum, posed concerns for the socially mobile. For the Marines, the phenomenon or pattern of 'naval' or 'military' families, where membership is related to multiple generations, is not unknown to the Marines.⁸⁰ Peter Wilson suggests there are clear links between social and military

⁷⁴ Scholars do not agree on what does and what does not define the term "culture" when applied to organisations. Joanne Martin examines the wide range of stances and arguments across different academic disciplines in, Joanne Martin, *Organizational Culture: Mapping the Terrain*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2002), 56-59.

⁷⁵ Mats Alverson, *Understanding Organizational Culture*, (London: Sage Publications, 2002) 3.

⁷⁶ Andrew Brown, *Organisational Culture*, Second Edition, (London: Financial Times Management, 1998) 7.

⁷⁷ Peter Wilson, "Defining Military Culture", *The Journal of Military History* 72 (January 2008) 12.

⁷⁸ Moyer, "The Current State of Military History", 231.

⁷⁹ Bittner, "Shattered Images", 48.

⁸⁰ Wilson, "Defining Military Culture", 29; Bittner "Shattered Images", 32-33.

hierarchies, but that we should look beyond issues of class alone in order to identify what further shapes military cultures.⁸¹

Culture informs identity, but the scope for the consideration of military culture in this work is bounded by two important factors: how it informs the specific case of a marine identity in conflict with its parent organisation, and how this identity inhibited its own successes and mission. To this latter point, Edgar Schein has cited how within an organisation as cultural assumptions form around the means by which goals are to be accomplished, these will inevitably involve the internal issues of status and identity, in turn highlighting the complexity of both the analysis of means and the issues surrounding efforts to change an organisation accomplishes its goals.⁸² This important point would become a central and perennial issue for the Royal Marines. Schein also states that organisations which experience survival crises often discovered in their responses to such crises what some of their deeper assumptions really were. Schein concludes that through this process, an important piece of an organisation's culture can be genuinely latent.⁸³ This result was not, as will be shown, the result in the case of the Royal Marines in this period. A key inhibitor was in fact another conclusion of Schein, and one argued here which proved detrimental to the Corps, which was consensus on the core mission and identity does not automatically guarantee that the key members of the organisation will have common goals or that the various subcultures will be appropriately aligned to fulfil the mission.⁸⁴

The relationship between land and sea identities, whether they be local, regional, corporate or national, is one that has in recent years increasingly attracted historians. As the popularity of the term "identity" has become among historians, more diverse have its meanings and interpretations become. Between practitioners of different disciplines, consensus is perhaps less important than framing it and using it in this case towards the examination of historical issues and better understanding of an issue.⁸⁵ Jeremy Black has noted how the "recent emphasis on the culture of military organisation[s]" has helped "bridge traditional military and non-military concerns and methods".⁸⁶ Peter Wilson has stated, "that military culture is a specific form of institutional culture and that viewing armies from this perspective offers new insight into how they functioned and the nature of their interaction with state and society."⁸⁷ Wilson has offered a conceptual framework to better understand the norms and values of soldiers and armies in the past. He defined this approach further, stating that, "Military culture implies the existence of a specific institution, since the contention here is that it is different from a culture of violence, though

⁸¹ Wilson, "Defining Military Culture", 29.

⁸² Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, (San Francisco: Josey Bass, 2010) 83.

⁸³ Schein, 90.

⁸⁴ Schein, 78.

⁸⁵ Duncan Redford, *Maritime History and Identity: The Sea and Culture in the Modern World*, ed. Duncan Redford, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014) 2.

⁸⁶ Jeremy Black, "War and the World, 1450-2000", *The Journal of Military History*, 63, no. 3 (July 1999), 670.

⁸⁷ Wilson, "Defining Military Culture", 11.

it may well be part of that, too.”⁸⁸ Studies of the Royal Navy that have approached these themes include Margerette Lincoln and her work on the Georgian Navy, and Mary Conley on how ‘Jack Tar’ of the late Victorian and Edwardian navies personified accepted British values.⁸⁹ Jan Rüger demonstrated how the Royal Navy was elevated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as a symbolic embodiment of the British nation, where “the enthusiasm for modern technology was indistinguishable from expressions of national identity”.⁹⁰

The importance or significance of military culture and identity, and how they are created, has been a subject of recent study by historians. Heather Streets has cited how the forming of a martial identity was key to the Highland soldiers and Sikh Soldiers, where service guaranteed degrees of status, popularity, and a strong sense of group, cultural and regional identity.⁹¹ In defining military culture, Williamson Murray stated: “Military culture represents the ethos and professional attributes, both in terms of experience and intellectual study, that contribute to a common core understanding of the nature of war within military organizations.”⁹² Other recent scholarship has presented a history of the navy as a social and cultural institution that can provide new understandings of the navy’s relationship with British society.⁹³ In the words of one reviewer, “this new historiography guarantees that our investigation of the relationship between the Royal Navy and British society and culture continues to expand and adapt with British historiography generally.”⁹⁴ Mary Conley examined how the Royal Navy, and specifically the sailor, experienced positive change and image reform in this period, and questioning Mackenzie’s claim as to the extent the soldier surpassed or even overtook the parallel popular image of the sailor.⁹⁵ Conley stated the image of sailors, and the presentation of the Royal Navy in the process, was reformed and no longer was the British sailor a ‘bawdy drunkard’ but a hero of the Empire.⁹⁶ Conley argued that evolving imperial missions and ideologies of late Victorian manhood shaped the transformation of the navy by the late nineteenth century. According to Conley, a distinct agenda was underway to present the Royal Navy seamen as exemplars of British manhood abroad and hence personified the British global civilizing mission.⁹⁷ That the sailor, as argued by Conley, was undergoing this image rethink at this time suggests the same may have been occurring for the marine. Isaac Land has cited the

⁸⁸ Wilson, 14.

⁸⁹ Mary Conley examined the relationship between the Royal Navy and British society in *Jack Tar to Union Jack, representing naval manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009) and Margerette Lincoln in *Representing the Royal Navy: British Seapower, 1750-1815*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

⁹⁰ Jan Rüger, “Nation, Empire and Navy: Identity Politics in the United Kingdom 1887-1914”, *Past and Present*, no. 185 (Nov. 2004) 184.

⁹¹ Heather Streets, *Martial Races*, 211-212.

⁹² Williamson Murray, “Does Military Culture Matter?”, *Orbis*, 43, 1, (Winter 1999), 27.

⁹³ Don Leggett, “Navy, nation and identity in the long nineteenth century”, *Journal for Maritime Research*, 13, no. 2 (2011), 151.

⁹⁴ Leggett, “Navy, nation and identity”, 161.

⁹⁵ Conley, *Jack Tar*, 7-8.

⁹⁶ Conley, 125, 128.

⁹⁷ Conley, 125-128.

utility of discussing individuals and groups, like the Marines who are susceptible to redefinition, in terms of 'framing' rather than 'forging'. 'Framing', according to Land, allows groups, such as the sailors he discusses, to reconfigure their defined borders to suit new factors, either external or self-defined.⁹⁸ These studies by Conley and Land offer a method for a considered approach towards better defining the Royal Marines in context to the Royal Navy as their own separate entity. Identity for the Marines was purposely stretched as much as their role and purpose could be reshaped as evidenced by their long history. This thesis argues that identity in the case of the Royal Marines was itself an evolutionary process and will further assert that identity, in the case of the Marines, was by necessity malleable.

Conclusion

Assessing the historiographical landscape of naval history and the more recent social and cultural studies of the Royal Navy, it is apparent that these themes have not been fully explored. Furthermore, studies of the Royal Marines to date have largely focused on either formative years of the eighteenth century and the Napoleonic Wars, or have instead examined the twentieth century and the Royal Marine Commandos which today dominates our contemporary understanding of the Marines. These factors combined have discounted the significance of the influential years of the long nineteenth century, and the significant social and cultural obstacles the Royal Marines faced from both internal and external factors. This thesis seeks to fill some of these gaps, and also to point to approaches for further study on military identities and culture. In this way, this thesis hopes to not only illustrate the importance of further examining the Royal Marines, but also how an organisation which has cultivated its own unique identity and role while a part of a larger parent group might be studied.

The identified extent of this researched period, 1827 to early 1927, begins with the Marines following defining years for Britain in the Napoleonic Wars and at the end of the defining nineteenth century, and through the modern age of warfare of the First World War. It allows a focus on the Marines amidst the social changes occurring in Britain during the nineteenth century, as well as its involvement in the numerous campaigns and expeditions of the so-called *Pax Britannica*. It also intentionally avoids the significant cultural shift assumed by the Marines with their significant occupational and institutional transformation to the Commandos of World War II. While the proposed research period appears to be a wide time frame for examination, it is entirely necessary in order to consider the important episodes and factors within this interval, which will bring forward these key themes around which this research is framed into better focus.

⁹⁸ Isaac Land discusses his 'framing' over 'forging' argument for considering sailors in the discourse of nationalism and British identity in detail in *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) 162-164.

My methodology will be to examine the development of the Royal Marines during the stated period, focusing on those relationships with British society, their communities where they lived, and their military peers. This method will delve into the relationship between the Corps and society, comparing its relative status amongst the other services, and its maturation through key events and personages influencing its development.

Chapter 2. Military identity and the Royal Marines: apart, in conflict, in peril

But the *marines*, and the marine artillery, like the noble war-horse, have contributed more than their share in all the great battles in which they have participated; and, like the war-horse, too, they have hitherto been unrewarded with anything but the bare provender which was indispensable to keep them fit for their work. - Sir Robert Steele, 1840⁹⁹

Robert Steele, a Marine officer who first entered service in 1803, wrote these words in his 1840 memoir and captures an important sentiment about the Royal Marines and the state of their organisation. Steele's observation would be echoed similarly with frequency by others of his generation, and by many more in the decades to come. Steele conveys to the reader the image of his Corps labouring devotedly for the good of the nation yet failing to garner the recognition it deserved. Steele's argument is an emotive one, based on his own perception and evaluation of the contributions of his Corps to many British military campaigns. This sentiment was duly linked to an espoused characteristic of Royal Marine organisational identity as that of an embattled regiment. This belief also insisted that the deeds of the Corps would be subsumed into those of the Navy, except in the rare cases where individual actions called out by necessity the organisation to which they belonged. This chapter explores the defining characteristics of the Royal Marine identity, both physical and intangible.

A brief history of the Corps from its incarnation up to the present day opens this chapter. It further contextualises and highlights the key factors of Corps identity, points of tension, and an indication of how the Corps organisational structure and mission was forced to evolve. This chapter is next broken down in sections. The first examines the beliefs held in common to the organisation, in turn inculcated in its members such as the Corps' memorable dates but also those of a distinct 'otherness' from the services, especially the navy. The next explores the outward displays, the uniforms and motifs used by the Corps as expressions of their service and membership. Before concluding, it will examine how the Corps was organised at this stage, and how its organisation along with its established traditions were at odds with its parent service. Underpinning this is an argument which states that the Marine identity was apart, frequently in conflict with the other services, and often in peril. Argued here is that the constructed identity of the Corps was fragile and in conflict with the Royal Navy, its parent service. This in turn raised further challenges to making it a distinguishable and viable organisation within Britain's military forces. As the first substantive chapter launching the arguments of this thesis, this chapter defines further the significance of some key dates and events, principally between 1827 and 1927, to underscore the overarching aim of this thesis which is to show how the struggle to

⁹⁹ Words in italics are Steele's emphasis. Sir Robert Steele, *The Marine Officer*, Vol. I, (London: Henry Colburn, 1840), 271.

retain and define a cohesive identity also came into conflict with the principle challenge of defining a coherent mission.

Culture, Military identity, and the Royal Marines

As Mats Alverson has stated, “Culture is not primarily ‘inside’ people’s heads, but somewhere ‘between’ the heads of a group of people where symbols and meanings are publicly expressed.”¹⁰⁰ It is therefore important to consider how these emblems were significant to the creation of the unique identity for this organisation. In 2010, the Royal Marines website placed the following statement addressing this:

There is much written about ethos and it is often wrongly conceived. However, far from being complex, ethos is actually straightforward; defined simply it is what a group does and how it does it. The ethos of the Royal Marines refers to our role and the way we fulfil it.¹⁰¹

The importance therefore of a commonly understood ethos, built on a confirmed history and heritage is of importance to military organisations.¹⁰² In his detailed study of the present-day Royal Marines Commandos, Anthony King evaluated the Royal Marines’ ethos citing how the Corps’ attested long history and organisational evolution as contributing factors. In the construction of military identities are two important elements: the outward displays of emblems, uniforms, colours, badges and other recognisable displays; and the curation and maintenance of key dates and events, including battle honours, towards the construction of the organisational narrative. These are important to our understanding of military cultures and the progression of how these organisations understand and view themselves, including the outward displays and manifestations. The Royal Marines also addresses how their ethos is informed by their recognition of important historical tradition as follows:

Whilst ethos is what we do and how we do it, it draws upon historical tradition. Corps history since 1664 gives us an identity, a collective pride and a host of great ‘dits’,¹⁰³ not to mention 10 Victoria Crosses! But our Commando role is relatively recent, dating back to Churchill’s demand for the raising of raiding forces to harass the Continent after the debacle of May 1940. Our symbol of the Globe and Laurel remains appropriate because, like our forebears, we must be prepared to fight and

¹⁰⁰ Alverson, *Understanding Organizational Culture*, 4.

¹⁰¹ TNA UK Government Web Archive, 1 October 2010, <http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/royalmarines/history-and-ethos/ethos-beliefs/>, accessed 25 February 2019.

¹⁰² Frequently cited in this thesis is the parallel organisation, the US Marine Corps, who shares a comparable philosophy and stresses the importance of indoctrination of its new membership and leaders to the significance of a shared and common ethos. This is well defined and discussed in an entire chapter of, “Our Ethos”, in MCWP 6-11, *Leading Marines*, United States Marine Corps, (Quantico: USMC, 2014), 1-1 – 1-20, accessed from: <https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/MCWP%206-11%20Leading%20Marine.pdf>

¹⁰³ “Dits” is British naval jargon for an exaggerated story or ‘yarn’.

win, anywhere in the world. The difference now is the way we fight – the Commando role – exemplified by the Commando dagger that is now our formation flash.¹⁰⁴

Much is included in this statement: the importance of a common history which inspires organisational pride, recognition of past achievements of its membership, the acknowledgement of the recent commando role, and finally the use of important emblems which are representative of common values and heritage. To this point, Anthony King cites the significance of the Corps emblem, the Globe and Laurel, and its interpretation and relevance to the current Royal Marines Commandos of today: “The history of the Corps and the Globe and Laurel itself are an essential part of the ethos of the Royal Marines today but it is important to realise that contemporary ethos is not a natural product of three hundred years’ service.”¹⁰⁵ As King states, the contemporary green beret with the Globe and Laurel affixed does little to convey the earlier roles of the artillery or the light infantry.¹⁰⁶ Even so, the significance and importance of the construction of a unique legacy remains important. In the British forces, the date of origin for a regiment or service conferred a hierarchical status on that unit. The Royal Navy frequently uses the moniker of ‘the senior service’ in relation to its relative status in the British military forces, alluding to early origins in English history. For the Royal Marines, agreement on the original foundation date varied. As will be shown, a specific date of origin for the Marines is more contentious, varying between 1664 and 1755, and contributed to internal debates over an agreed incarnation date. As King states, “the institutional memory of the Royal Marines remains important not because the Royal Marines really are the direct descendants of those soldiers who fought at Trafalgar then, but because this institutional memory imbues the current commando ethos of the Corps with a sacred tradition.”¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the effort to roll the nativity of the Corps over three hundred years, is as King states, “a case of an invented tradition.”¹⁰⁸ As King cites, the key distinguishing factor is that the present day commando function of the Royal Marines bears very little resemblance to those roles formerly occupied by their forebears who wore the same badge.¹⁰⁹ This chapter will examine the choice and creation of specific emblems, and how these put them at odds with other services. To gain further understanding about the creation of the Corps identity, this chapter begins with a brief history of the Corps to the present day.

¹⁰⁴ TNA UK Government Web Archive, 1 October 2010, <http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/royalmarines/history-and-ethos/ethos-beliefs/>, accessed 25 February 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Anthony King, “The Ethos Of The Royal Marines: The Precise Application Of Will”, Department of Sociology, University of Exeter, May 2004, 5. Accessed from: <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10036/58653/RMethos4.pdf> - last accessed 20 February 2019.

¹⁰⁶ King, *Ethos*, 5.

¹⁰⁷ King, 5.

¹⁰⁸ King, 5.

¹⁰⁹ King, 5-6.

Who are the Royal Marines? - creating and organisation and a unique identity

The Royal Marines claim a long lineage of service to the nation. In 2014, the Royal Marines celebrated their 350 year anniversary with great pomp, at once connecting the present day Royal Marines those of the earliest army regiments raised in 1664, the Duke of York and Albany's Maritime Regiment of Foot, of soldiers who would serve at sea.¹¹⁰ For the Royal Marines, despite long association with the Admiralty for sea service, its early origins both functionally and administratively retained the characteristics of earlier infantry or foot regiments of the army to which they had belonged.¹¹¹ Traditionally, regiments assigned for sea service were typically disbanded at one war's conclusion and usually reformed at the start of a new one. From this process, the lineage of many British army regiments claimed marine and amphibious origins.¹¹²

The Corps of Marines of the present day has in fact evolved from the latest reconstitution of the Marines in 1755 under the Admiralty.¹¹³ As will be explored, without this essential link to the navy and sea service, the marines might have continued to exist as another army regiment. The Marines were further organised into some fifty companies across three divisions at the Royal Dockyards and port towns of Portsmouth, Plymouth, and Chatham, and would, "be appointed to serve on board Your Majesty's Ships and Vessels at such times in such Proportions and under such Orders and Regulations, as Your High Admiral or Commissioners of the Admiralty shall judge proper".¹¹⁴ This latest incarnation of a British Corps of Marines, would finally break the cycle of precarious existence of Britain's nascent amphibious force. The reinstated Corps of Marines provided an integrated force for service with the navy sea and on land, serving aboard nearly every class of naval warship, and from this point were left by the Admiralty to define the organisational character and identity of their regiment. Their role as soldiers who served on land and at sea with the navy would remain defining characteristics of their organisation. The marines of 1755 served with distinction in both the land and sea campaigns of their day, notably at Belle Isle in the Seven Year's War, Bunker Hill in the American War of Independence, and Trafalgar during the Napoleonic Wars.¹¹⁵ Serving with the Royal Navy would prove to be the Corps' defining characteristic, without which the Marines were otherwise undistinguishable from any other army regiment. The Marines also benefitted within the Royal Navy as the only service with fixed term enlistments and other predictable measures to their patterns of life, such as a barracks, duty at sea and

¹¹⁰ *A Short History of the Royal Marines*, Brian Edwards, ed., (Portsmouth: Royal Marines Historical Society, 2013) 7. See also LtCol Clifford S. Dare, *Royal Marines 350: A pictorial record of RM350 events during this anniversary year*, Special Publication no.46, (Portsmouth: Royal Marines Historical Society, 2017).

¹¹¹ Edwards, *Short History* 6-7; see also Julian Thompson, *The Royal Marines: From Sea Soldiers to a Special Force*, (London: Pan MacMillan 2001) 10, 36.

¹¹² See Zerbe, *The Birth of the Royal Marines*, 2-45; *Short History*, 7-11; Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 9-17.

¹¹³ "Proposal of an Establishment of Marines", 29 March 1755, ADM 2/1152, 1-5.

¹¹⁴ ADM 2/1152, 4.

¹¹⁵ Edwards, *Short History*, 12-17.

ashore, standard uniforms for both officers and men, and a system for professional advancement and training. Most importantly, Marines in this period could also rely on a well-defined occupational role within the navy rather than a specified mission. At sea, Marines protected the ship from boarding parties and could likewise aid in the direct engagement of other ships, or on land with naval raiding parties or 'cutting out' expeditions. Despite the early promise of amphibious potential, these early marines were still far from the elite crack troops of the later mid-twentieth century.¹¹⁶ Marines also served as the navy's security force at sea to protect vital stores as well as provide a barrier between the sailors and the ship's officers. In this way, Marines were also physically and visibly divided from sailors, in separate berthing and messing, and by their distinct red jacket which stood out in a period when most ordinary sailors did not have their own official uniform.¹¹⁷ While Marines were not entirely immune from collaboration in naval mutinies, their role in keeping good order and discipline at sea put them in a different category altogether from the sailors they served alongside. On land, Marines always returned to their Divisions where they lived in barracks, whereas sailors were kept aboard ship or disbanded when a ship was paid off. This fact, and other expressions of a Corps being marginalised by the other services, became embedded in the Marines' unique military identity and culture, increasingly viewing themselves as a service "apart".¹¹⁸

The Napoleonic Wars and the peace which followed brought some organisational changes. In 1802, the Corps of Marines were granted the honorific title 'Royal', making them the Royal Marines.¹¹⁹ The Marines had also survived disbandment, but despite their achievements in the late war, the Royal Marines did not achieve the distinction of rewards and honours due to its membership, particularly the officers, equivalent to the other services for an organisation of its size. The creation of the Royal Marines Artillery had occurred in 1804 where detachments of marines were utilised to man what the Royal Navy termed as 'bomb ketches', essentially mobile artillery platforms for lobbing shells from heavy mortars for siege and bombardment purposes of shore installations.¹²⁰ In 1827, these artillery marines were consolidated into a distinct regiment within the Royal Marines, known as the Royal Marines Artillery or R.M.A. This new arrangement effected the unusual situation of effectively two regiments or organisations within a single regiment. The first, retaining the common title of Royal Marines, were the ordinary infantry soldiers serving in the divisions for sea service per their original purpose, and the second being the artillery. The artillery adopted a blue uniform, common to the traditional uniform of the Royal Artillery and of a royal regiment and would be known internally as the 'Blue

¹¹⁶ Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 17.

¹¹⁷ Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy: Ships, Men and Organisation, 1793-1815*, (London: Conway, 1989) 155-156.

¹¹⁸ Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 2; Zerbe, *The Birth of the Royal Marines*, 243-244.

¹¹⁹ Edwards, *Short History*, 16.

¹²⁰ Edwards, 16.

Marines'. Otherwise, the Corps retained the red uniform common to the British army and would be known as the 'Red Marines'. This development signalled how much the Royal Marines clung to the culture and traditions of the British army, which would prove a continued source of tension within the Admiralty and the Royal Navy.

Following the Napoleonic Wars, Britain enjoyed a supremacy at sea with its Royal Navy with few prospective rivals, which would last throughout the nineteenth century. The Marines would serve throughout the nineteenth century in the numerous campaigns and expeditions of the so-called *Pax Britannica*. This era was also defined by reform of naval administration and manning, as well as new technology in steam ships and naval gunnery, and which now cast doubt as to the utility and future role of the marines. As will be shown, by the mid-nineteenth century, the traditional roles marines held in the navy would become anachronistic and defining a suitable role and mission would evade them. Increasing ambiguity about the role of the Marines were the subject of debates as to what role or purpose they served.¹²¹ As will be shown, this debate over a distinct role and mission would highlight the Marines as an organisation that was viewed by some neither useful nor well defined and underscore their fragile identity as sea soldiers. In 1855 following the Crimean War, the infantry would be renamed the Royal Marines Light Infantry, or R.M.L.I., reminiscent of the army organisations which emphasised a fit and versatile force.¹²² The Royal Marines now had two distinct branches which effectively developed in parallel as independent regiments under one organisational body, developing their own separate identities along an army regimental model, while retaining allegiance and membership to the original parent organisation of the Royal Marines. While the arrangement may have created a sense of healthy internal competition, it will be argued here that having two competitive organisations within a parent organisation who itself struggled to define its own sense of purpose was in fact a recipe for disaster. While both continued to serve their functions for the Royal Navy, the problem of the Royal Marines actual purpose unravelled through the nineteenth century, as did determining their relative value and contribution. It will be shown how the Royal Marines propagation of this distinct organisational culture akin to that of the regimental culture of the British army, further contributed to their elusive quest of an organisational mission and served as further source of antagonism within the navy.

By the mid-nineteenth, what had once existed as a clearly defined role within the Royal Navy became increasingly ambiguous. Improvements to naval gunnery decreased the likelihood of close actions at sea, and it was accepted that sailors with instruction were just as capable at repelling boarders as marines. Also, while the navy had previously relied on methods of both enticement and impressment to man the fleet, by the mid-

¹²¹ Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 42.

¹²² Edwards, *Short History*, 23.

nineteenth century the navy had improved the professional structure and occupational pathways towards developing professional skills and specialisations for sailors as will be examined in further detail.¹²³ Occupations within the navy, from seamanship to gunnery, were now structured with training regimens and opportunities advancement in a career field. For the marines, the time-honoured role as a shipboard police force, keeping both order and discipline at sea and providing a thin red line between the officers of the fleet from would-be mutinous men below decks, was now considered redundant. Equally frustrating to the marines, sailors were being employed on land in military roles as landing parties and in the employment of guns, which the marines believed to be their own role and purpose. This idea that sailors could and might replace the one traditional roles of marines proved an alarming development for the marines. Increasingly, Marine officers were consigned as the least useful members at sea, even after the Chaplain on larger ships. This study will examine many illustrations of this in both private letters and official sources and documents, such as Royal Commissions. Defining what role the Marines would play in imperial defence, especially as the Royal Navy was adapting to the massive changes that the 'age of steam' brought about became increasingly urgent. The overall effect of these changes increased fears amongst Marines and their supporters of renewed threats of their disbandment.

The early twentieth century saw the Royal Marines gain acclaim for their participation in South Africa in the Boer War and in the defence of the Peking Legation, but the achievements of the Corps during the First World War were all but subsumed into the great events of this global conflict. The Marines participated from early days with a landing in France and later in Belgium, among the first to be despatched. They participated notably at Gallipoli in 1915 and at Jutland in 1916, but their participation on the Western Front with the Naval Division is hardly well known.¹²⁴ The daring 1918 raid at Zeebrugge garnered mixed results, but signalled their ability to conduct raids from the sea in modern war. Following the First World War, calls for more budget cuts and naval treaties seemed to doom the very future of the Corps as dramatic force reductions forced the disposal of the marine artillery entirely to avoid complete extinction. At this critical point, as will be explored further in this thesis, discussions about how the Marines might seize upon and develop British amphibious doctrine was examined but discarded.

The remaining inter-war years saw marines remain in traditional roles on ships of the fleet. The Second World War and specifically 1942, described by Julian Thompson as a "watershed" year for changes in the Royal Marines, saw the adoption of the Commandos. The impact of this new venture, according to Thompson, would usher in a rate of change

¹²³ "Royal Commission to inquire into best Means of manning Navy", (London: George E. Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1859), xi. Hereafter cited as "RC 1859".

¹²⁴ Field, *Britain's Sea Soldiers*, Vol.1, i.

for the Royal Marines resulting in the Corps becoming “almost unrecognizable” to anyone who had served in it all its preceding years. These Royal Marines Commandos inherited an organisation defined by nearly 300 years of struggle for survival and pursuit of a viable mission within Britain’s armed forces. In the present day, the Royal Marines have thus far managed to retain it. The challenges which exist today, as will be shown, have their origins in the crises found in 1827 through 1927. Here is briefly why.

An organisation still in crisis

The Royal Marines exist today, much as they were during the period of this study, as a subordinate division or ‘fighting arm’ of the Royal Navy.¹²⁵ As the above history has described, the Royal Marines have frequently faced the challenge of maintaining a viable role in the ambiguous space between land and sea. Today, following periods of prolonged conflict in a new century, the Royal Marines again face similar challenges in this precarious balance as the United Kingdom’s designated amphibious forces for commitments and both land and sea.¹²⁶ In a 2012 article for the professional Royal Navy journal, *Naval Review*, a Royal Marine Officer considered the historic conversion of the Corps to a commando regiment in context to the evolution of its own history and how the invention of the Commandos had created the added problem for the regiment of risking forgetting its amphibious past:

The commando conversion has come at a significant cost to the Naval Service. It has occluded the older maritime legacy of the Corps. Most Royal Marines are ‘sea blind’, focused almost exclusively on the land environment (often not even the littoral). The only organisation carrying the torch of that maritime heritage has been the Landing Craft Squadron which sits apart from the commando units. As a result, the Naval Service has over the last 50 years lost its understanding and unified concept of maritime warfare. The [RM] and [RN] have evolved along quite separate paths. Royal Marines now have more in common with their army cousins than their matelot brothers.¹²⁷

The accusation of institutional ‘sea-blindness’ is one described further by Andrew Lambert in his recent work on the seapower identity of modern states and governments, warning that seapower and seapower identity for a state such as the United Kingdom requires

¹²⁵ The five fighting arms consist of the Surface Fleet, the Submarine Service, the Fleet Air Arm, the Royal Marines, and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, see <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/our-organisation> accessed 2 March 2020.

¹²⁶ Nicholas C. Prime has asserted that similar to the Royal Marines, the US Marine Corps has struggled to reassert itself as an amphibious organisation following the intense conflicts of the twenty-first century in Iraq and Afghanistan, dominated by land warfare, leaving its bonds with the Navy, the Marines’ natural partner, increasingly atrophied and weak, with the joint forcible entry amphibious mission has evaporated under the glaring heat of new anti-access/area-denial capabilities fielded by the nation’s competitors. See Nicholas C. Prime, “Toward an ‘Open Source’ Maritime Force Structure”, Center for a New American Security, June 25, 2017. Accessed online, 12 August 2019 - <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/toward-an-open-source-maritime-force-structure>.

¹²⁷ Captain James Sladden, RM, “Challenging the Commando Shibboleth”, *Naval Review Journal*, (November 2012), 398.

constant sustainment.¹²⁸ Sladden further cites how the routine employment of Royal Marines to OP HERRICK¹²⁹ to “rescue the Army’s deployment cycle” from the continued demand for additional ground troops in operations, was detrimental to an organisation of amphibious commandos in the Naval Service.¹³⁰ Sladden also criticised Royal Marines objectives stated in the 2011 defence review within the armed forces as too broad and lacking supportability. Similarly, Sladden stated how the consequences of these more recent operations by Marines serving in a seemingly indistinguishable capacity and ill-defined role alongside the army in Afghanistan, has today contributed to the problems for the Marines in redefining their purpose and role much as it did a century ago.¹³¹ While Sladden is an evident critic of these more recent developments, this study will show that these most recent employment of the Royal Marines have served in part to uphold a tradition of showcasing the Royal Navy at the forefront of operations worldwide, even deployed to unexpected or landlocked areas. By using the Royal Marines, the Royal Navy in perpetual competition with the army, is able to continue to demonstrate its utility to the British public that it remains involved in all aspects of British defence needs.

More recently, the Royal Marines have been the subject of recent enquiries by the British government evaluating defence needs and the capabilities and platforms needed to provide for domestic security, as well as maintain Britain’s role as a member of international treaties and partnerships, such as NATO, and the continuing need for marines and the ships need to deliver them.¹³² Consequently, the Royal Marines today are facing a new organisational identity crisis as they seek to innovate, adapt, and reshape their organisation to match the United Kingdom’s defence needs. Announced in February 2019, a new plan for a “Future Commando Force” called for the most dramatic reorganisation of the Royal Marines since the 1950s, and was revealed in a series of briefings and conference gatherings.¹³³ In 2019, the Royal Marines announced the launch of a recalibration of their organisational mission to suit Britain’s defence needs. In a speech to the Defence and Security Equipment International in September 2019, the Commandant General of the Royal Marines Major Gen Matt Holmes, said: “The scale and

¹²⁸ Andrew Lambert, *Seapower States*, (London: Yale University Press, 2019) 328. Lambert offers this definition of “seapower” in his book as: “an identity consciously created by medium-sized powers attempting to exploit the asymmetric strategic and economic advantages of maritime power, to enable them to act as great powers...It is a constructed identity, requiring endless repetition and reassertion.” 333.

¹²⁹ The British name for the operational military deployments to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014.

¹³⁰ Sladden, “Challenging the Commando Shibboleth”, 399-400.

¹³¹ See “Sunset for the Royal Marines?”, HC Defence Committee, HC 622, 4 February 2018, accessed from: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmdfence/622/622.pdf>.

¹³² The disposal of the Royal Navy’s amphibious fleet was judged to be severely detrimental to the continued existence of the Royal Marines, as well as a recognition that recent conflicts had drawn the Royal Marines away from their amphibious purpose, see “Sunset for the Royal Marines?”, HC 622; The Royal Marines have sought to reassert their niche of expertise in arctic warfare and their ability to operate inter-dependently with NATO allies, notably other marine organisations such as the Dutch *Korps Mariniers* and the US Marine Corps, see “On Thin Ice: UK Defence in the Arctic”, HC Defence Committee, HC 388, 15 August 2018, 15-17, 43-50. Accessed from: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmdfence/388/388.pdf>

¹³³ The impending reorganisation was first announced by then Minister for Defence Gavin Williamson in a speech at the Royal United Service Institute in February 2019, see <https://rusi.org/event/gavin-williamson-transforming-uk-defence-meet-global-threats-tomorrow> – accessed 2 March 2020.

ambition of our transformation is significant. Nothing is off-limits and we aspire to be at the cutting edge of defence.”¹³⁴ Described as, “the most significant transformation and rebranding programme launched since [World War 2]”¹³⁵, the changes beginning in 2020 would bring structural and mission changes, as well as changes to the uniform.

On 27th June 2020, it was announced that the Royal Marines would adopt a minor uniform change. Months of speculation had indicated a more radical change, possibly including Marine Officers adopting naval officer ranks. An updated battle dress uniform with some modifications were announced, “fit for a new era of warfare, that is in-keeping with the maritime traditions of the corps, and also honours their commando forebears”.¹³⁶ A short film on the Royal Marines web based YouTube Channel stated simply, “Sometimes for us to move forward, we must first look back”¹³⁷ The “look back” is a change to the patch or ‘flash’ on the battle dress uniform to a Red letter on blue which is part of the retro WWII: “The flash with red writing and navy-blue background will be worn once again, as commandos evolve to conduct more raids from the sea, persistently deployed to counter the threats of the modern-day battlefield.” The red and blue in fact goes back further to the red and blue uniforms of the two different components of the Corps - infantry, artillery.

Another more subtle but unprecedented change was also included: “For the first time the White Ensign features on one sleeve, as a clear indication of the Royal Marines’ integration with the Royal Navy.”¹³⁸ Since its reforming in 1755, the Royal Marines refrained from adopting nothing but the most general naval motifs to their uniforms, seeking to create for themselves a unique identity apart from the navy. This study will show how the original identity created by the Royal Marines created more friction with the Royal Navy, their service parent. Modelling themselves in multiple ways around the army, the original identity crafted by the Marines was at times adversarial, and over time increasingly fragile as traditional missions and functions eroded around them. Their necessity to the navy was not so clear, an identity as something other than naval was increasingly of detriment to the Royal Marines.

In the late twentieth century, the Royal Marines had moved to a leaner and better equipped organisation Royal Marines shaped around the concept of ‘littoral strike’, believed by advocates of positional warfare as essential “to seize geographically limited areas that confer outsized political influence on the side that holds them.”¹³⁹ The proposed

¹³⁴ Martin Freeman, “Royal Marines top brass slams US Marine Corps-style overhaul of UK corps “, Plymouth Live, 5 November 2019, Accessed from - <https://www.plymouthherald.co.uk/news/local-news/former-royal-marines-officer-concerned-3502060>, Accessed 2 March 2020.

¹³⁵ “New Commando Uniform For Royal Marines”, Royal Navy, 27 June 2020 – accessed from <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2020/june/27/200626-royal-marines-new-uniform>

¹³⁶ “New Commando Uniform For Royal Marines”.

¹³⁷ “Royal Marines | New Uniform”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOKXTGWOCaU> – accessed 29 June 2020.

¹³⁸ “Royal Marines | New Uniform”.

¹³⁹ Sidharth Kaushal and Jack Watling, “Requirements for the UK’s Amphibious Forces in the Future Operating Environment”, Royal United Services Institute, RUSI Occasional Paper, November 2019.

efforts would aim to more closely tie the Royal Marines to a range “scalable expeditionary strike force[s]” offered by the Royal Navy, but notably the raiding and destruction of enemy infrastructure and equipment to allow to enable the operations of the fleet and follow-on landing forces.¹⁴⁰ The proposals have raised concerns among former Royal Marines. Julian Thompson, who led 3rd Commando Brigade during the Falklands War and also a historian of the Corps, levelled his concern that the changes proposed to the Corps mission, that: “their unique character is that they are able to operate in all types of landscape and conditions. What we do not want is to change that so they have to say, ‘no, we can’t do that’.”¹⁴¹ More alarmingly for some are the suggestions from within the Royal Navy to change the Royal Marines rank structure and uniforms, which presently is similar to that of the army, to match those of the navy.¹⁴² To the uniform changes, Thompson stated: “This is a disastrous idea. The Marines are soldiers serving at sea, not sailors who pretend to be soldiers.”¹⁴³ These criticisms of over-specialisation and changes to uniforms are viewed by detractors as severe changes to the “unique characteristic” of the Royal Marines.¹⁴⁴ Are these changes really about innovation, or are they a bid to remain relevant and prove again the utility of the Royal Marines to the navy and the British defence community? Clearly, there is an appeal to the history of the Corps, signalling a link to the past and the last unequivocal moment the Royal Marines, as Commandos, had a clear sense of their purpose. Two items from this passage will be examined in detail in this thesis as having a clear historical precedent in the defined period of this thesis. Firstly, the concept of littoral strike was first advocated by Royal Marines at the start of the twentieth century as a means to innovate a new mission for the Corps. This venture failed, and it will be explained why. Secondly, the idea of the complete sublimation of the Royal Marine ranks and uniforms also found advocates and detractors at the turn of the twentieth century; this too failed. What these recent proposals and concerns about the organisational structure, mission, and material culture of the Royal Marines have in common is that they are not new and include both rational and emotive arguments which have grappled over change to this organisation since its inception. As will be shown in this study, retaining their purpose and utility, while balancing their own unique identity, was the critical imperative of the Royal Marines through their history.

In summary, the origins of many of today’s problems facing organisations like the marines are rooted in the past and worthy of examination. As these issues which centre on

Accessed from: <https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/requirements-uks-amphibious-forces-future-operating-environment> – accessed 2 March 2020.

¹⁴⁰ Kaushal, “Requirements”, 32-33.

¹⁴¹ Freeman, “Royal Marines top brass slams US Marine Corps-style overhaul of UK corps “, *Plymouth Live*.

¹⁴² Lucy Fisher, “Green Beret is the sole survivor as Royal Marines get a modern makeover”, *The Times*, Monday November 04 2019, 12.01am, Accessed from - <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/green-beret-is-the-sole-survivor-as-royal-marines-get-a-modern-makeover-phns5qmxk> – accessed 2 March 2020; Miles O’Leary, “Royal Navy considering plan to remove Royal Marine officer ranks”, *Devon Live*, 20 October 2019, accessed from: <https://www.devonlive.com/news/devon-news/royal-navy-considering-plan-remove-3448043> – accessed 2 March 2020.

¹⁴³ O’Leary, “Royal Navy considering plan to remove Royal Marine officer ranks”, *Devon Live*.

¹⁴⁴ Freeman, “Royal Marines top brass slams US Marine Corps-style overhaul of UK corps “, *Plymouth Live*.

important decisions and capital expenditures capture media headlines and public attention, the role of historians in analysing the origins of and the social and organisational issues that arise from the study of military organisations are of increasing importance. This renewed focus on innovation in the Royal Marines can be best characterised as a “renaissance” or a return to the most recent successful transformation and adopted mission of the Commandos of the Second World War.¹⁴⁵ Budgetary and fiscal constraints, cyclical in nature, reinforce the need for focused plans on government expenditures. For the Royal Marines, this moment again underscores the historical precarious nature of their organisation, driving an earnest desire to validate their relevance and utility. This preoccupation originates and is further defined in the period focused on in this study where we begin in 1827, a defining year for the Royal Marines.

Forging the Corps identity

On 20th October 1827, a combined fleet of British, French, and Russian vessels destroyed the Ottoman fleet at anchor in Navarino bay in Greece. The battle was notable as it was a decisive step for Greek and eastern European independence from the Turks, but also for being the last major engagement involving only wooden sailing ships. Corps historian Cyril Field noted in his history, “But little information is available as to the special doings of the Royal Marines at the famous Battle of Navarino, but as a large number of the Corps were present it cannot be passed over without some notice.”¹⁴⁶ The battle would feature some of the last close ship actions, in which the marines would play their designated role in manning ships’ guns and repelling boarders of the Turkish fleet with their habitual efficacy. In this year, the Royal Marines could look back on the successful accession to an improved status as a royal regiment and the fact that since its reincarnation under the Admiralty it had not been disbanded per old post-war customs. In addition, it had managed to create its own unique identity within the Royal Navy, complete with its own uniforms, badges, emblems and motifs underpinning its status as soldiers who served at sea, its strong link to the Royal Navy, and to its benefactors in the royal family and other patrons.

The establishment of early Royal Marine identity hinged on two important elements. The first was the crafting of a commonly accepted chronology from its origin to the present day. In the hierarchical culture of the British armed forces, this accomplished the essential function of placing the organisation in its position relative to the other service. The second was the creation of common emblems and symbols used in recognisable fashion for its own purposes – such as in uniforms and colours – and for the other services and the

¹⁴⁵ The term “renaissance” referring to the ongoing proposals for reviewing the operational roles and responsibilities within the Royal Navy, was offered in an interview with Brigadier Mike Tanner, RM on Thursday 12 March at NCHQ, Whale Island, Portsmouth.

¹⁴⁶ Field, *Sea Soldiers*, Vol. 2, 15.

public to recognise. The Marines had to ultimately make itself distinguishable from the army as not just another regiment of soldiers, but also distinctive within the navy as something extraordinary from the common sailor. Both would take time in crafting and would be subject to much change and debate. Essential to both elements is that the organisational narrative and its imagery commented and reinforced the operational function of the organisation.

The Corps origin date

For the Marines, accurately claiming an unbroken lineage across a successive line of maritime regiments remained tenuous and, as will be shown, had to be resolved by agreement on a common narrative. Despite this, the idea of stretching an unbroken line of service into history remains popular and is not an unknown concept among the British forces, as even the Royal Navy claims its own tenuous links to the ninth century navy of King Alfred the Great.¹⁴⁷ While today, the Royal Marines accept the date of 1664 as its origin date, this was a matter of debate of the Corps earliest historians whose agenda was largely the crafting of a Corps narrative supported by a rich history. The early maritime regiments faced several incarnations and dissolutions, but these were claimed and absorbed by the Marines. While ultimately fixing on 1664, Field makes no acknowledgement of any gaps in the history of the Corps itself. Field in fact went further by stretching the boundaries of Corps history and making tenuous links to early marine origins to Roman antiquity and the ancient British 'Sea Soldiers', or *Classiariorum Britannicorum*.¹⁴⁸ Field blended the earliest references to maritime soldiers into that of the early maritime regiments of the 1660s into the present day, and no specific mention of 1755 as the date of the latest inception of the Corps. Gillespie's history of 1803, written in part for the expressed purpose of marking the accession of the Corps to a Royal Regiment, chooses the now popularly accepted Duke of York and Albany's Maritime Regiment, or Admiral's Regiment¹⁴⁹, as the early origin for his treatment of the Corps, but uses the date of 1684.¹⁵⁰ Gillespie acknowledges 1755 as the date from which, "the Marine Corps has ever constituted a branch of the peace establishment."¹⁵¹ Richard Cannon in his army regimental histories uses the 1664 date in his chronology, noting the formation of the Admiral's Regiment and that, "from the 5th of April, 1755, the Marine corps have constituted a branch of the permanent national force, and have been provided

¹⁴⁷ Black, *British Seaborne Empire*, 20. The Royal Navy retains a shore based Royal Navy Reserve unit, HMS *King Alfred*, at Whale Island, Portsmouth - <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/our-organisation/maritime-reserves/royal-naval-reserve/units/king-alfred>.

¹⁴⁸ Latin translation is approximately 'British Troops trained for sea warfare' – Field in his effort to bring to the forefront the story of the Royal Marines, was also working to establish in the minds of his audience, that the service of soldiers who fight on and from the sea was an ancient concept, but also a very 'British' one as well. Cyril Field, *Britain's Sea-Soldiers*, Vol. 1, (Liverpool: The Lyceum Press, 1924) 1; for another article that examines the early instances of marines in antiquity, see John F. Charles, "The Marines of Athens", *The Classical Journal*, 44, no. 3 (December, 1948): 181-188.

¹⁴⁹ The Duke of York and Albany in this period was Charles II brother James, later James II. James was also Lord High Admiral, making the use of the Admiral's Regiment as a clear link to naval and maritime service.

¹⁵⁰ Gillespie, *An historical review of the Royal Marine Corps*, 2-3.

¹⁵¹ Gillespie, 117, 120.

for in the annual votes of the House of Commons, on distinct estimates produced at each session, of the Navy, Army, and Marines".¹⁵² Nicholas in his 1845 history, having mined Gillespie's works extensively for his chronology of Corps memorable dates and other portions of his narrative, makes identical assertions on the earliest origins, as well as the significance of the 1755 date.¹⁵³ The first departure from this consistency comes with the first volume on Corps history by former Deputy Adjutant General and Royal Marine historian H.E. Blumberg, who selected the date of 1755 as the best fitting date for the birth of the Corps, "as from this time more or less continuous letters and orders exist at the [R.M. Divisions] from which it is possible to trace the development of the Corps and its peculiar customs and traditions."¹⁵⁴ While the more popular date of 1664 remains the accepted Corps origin date, in keeping with the earliest regiments from the restoration period, Blumberg argued 1755 as the best and latest unbroken inception date for the Corps. This practice is very much in keeping with those of army regiments of the same period.¹⁵⁵ The Royal Marines found validation then in establishing the earliest possible point of origin, however tenuous, in establishing their unit identity and established traditions. The disputes occurred largely over accepted points from which a concept of either the idea marines existing in British service, or the existence of the organisational structure.

The Globe and Laurel – the significance of Royal Marine emblems

Interpretation of Corps identity through emblems was essential in the creation of established traditions. The early marine regiments were army regiments, and these traditions were brought over when the Corps reformed in 1755. Many of these traditions, it is argued here, helped create the distinct separate identity within the navy, but also promoted antagonism and detachment which proved harmful to their long-term relationship with the navy. Ranks were identical to those in the army, not the navy. Early choice of a red uniform in use by the army, not the navy, made the Marines visually and physically distinguishable in the navy. Finally, while the Corps embraced its role with the navy as 'soldiers of the sea', only the most modest and general nautical motifs, as will be shown here, were adopted for use in their visual displays. The Corps even made use of regimental colours, an army tradition.

¹⁵² Cannon, Esq., *Historical Record of the Marine Corps*, 1.

¹⁵³ Several portions of Nicholas' works repeat almost verbatim the text of Gillespie's own work. Nicolas, *Historical Records of the Royal Marine Forces*, Vol. I, ix, 45.

¹⁵⁴ Royal Marines Museum Archives, H.E. Blumberg, *A Record of the Royal Marines From 1755 to 1792*, unpublished. Portions of this manuscript were published by the Royal Marines Historical Society as "Extracts from Royal Marines Records Part 1 – 1755 to 92", by General Sir H.E. Blumberg KCB. While this edition is now out of print, there are plans for a new edition to be published in 2020 by the Society in cooperation with the National Museum of the Royal Navy.

¹⁵⁵ Only certain regiments of the Household Division claim an older lineage, based on their service and loyalty to the monarch through the years of the English Civil War. For more on the significance of army regimental hierarchy in this period, see J. M. Brereton, *A Guide to the Regiments and Corps of the British Army on the Regular Establishment* (London: Bodley Head, 1985).

The earliest symbolism evoking the maritime nature of the Corps emerged at about the time when the Corps was reformed under the Admiralty in 1755. Coincidentally, it was at about this time when standards for the other regiments which made up the British army became standardised. A Royal Warrant issued in 1743 by the Adjutant-General's Office of the War Department began to regulate certain features regarding the standards or colours carried by each regiment and limited the number to two for each battalion: one known as the King's Colour or First Colour, and the Second Colour which was popularly known as the Regimental Colour.¹⁵⁶ Colonels of regiments were now forbidden from adding their personalised crests and emblems on any outward displays of these regiments, a step which ensured an added measure of loyalty to the Crown. Certain standardised features dictated the size of the colours, the placement of motifs and emblems, numerals designating the regiment, size of the staff, other details. Special badges were granted to certain regiments, and the Marine Regiments of this period were granted the right to display "a ship with the sails furled and the rank of the Regiment underneath."¹⁵⁷ In 1747, just before the conclusion of the War of Austrian Succession, the Marine Regiments were transferred to the control of the Admiralty. It was on the order of the Admiralty that a fouled anchor was to be embroidered on the marine's caps, making this the oldest emblem of the Corps; these were designed and later produced and issued by the end of that year.¹⁵⁸ Importantly, the nature of the Marines' service at sea was what made it distinguishable from other army regiments, and being linked with nautical imagery. These emblems of the fouled anchor were included as well on the regimental colours.¹⁵⁹ There was a sense that the Corps was coming into its own, having now established itself within the navy and inventing new traditions.

The year 1827 holds a most important place in Royal Marines history for another reason. In this year, the Duke of Clarence as Lord High Admiral and the Corps' patron, made visits to each Division of the Royal Marines to present new colours. Beyond ceremony, it was the codification of Corps traditions and history into a tangible imagery. In each town – Plymouth, Portsmouth, and Chatham - these were occasions of great state ceremony and significant for several reasons. Firstly, as a member of the Royal family and the presumptive heir to the throne, receiving the colours from the Duke was significant. The Duke of Clarence held an honorific title as General of the Marines, and in his own right the Duke had spent his youth and early career as a naval officer. On his visit to Plymouth, the city fathers welcomed him with a special address, stating: "We participate in common with the inhabitants of this populous district in the general diffusion of joy elicited by your Royal

¹⁵⁶ Alistair J. Donald, *The Story of Colours in the Royal Marines*, Royal Marines Historical Society, Special Publication 23, (Portsmouth: Royal Marines Historical Society, 2001), 12-13.

¹⁵⁷ Quoted from Donald, *The Story of Colours in the Royal Marines*, 13.

¹⁵⁸ John Rawlinson, *Personal Distinctions*, Royal Marines Historical Society, Special Publication 41 (Portsmouth: Royal Marines Historical Society, 2014), 11.

¹⁵⁹ Donald, *The Story of Colours in the Royal Marines*, 16.

Presence: presiding at the head of that service, in which we are reminded, that your youth was passed, and (notwithstanding your illustrious birth) subjected to its dangers and vicissitudes.”¹⁶⁰ For these communities with strong links to the navy, this visit in particular was seized upon as an opportunity for a civic recognition of the value these communities played: “We rejoice at seeing your Royal attention directed to so important a branch of the public service, as that of the Naval Department, in which we may be allowed to take even a larger share of interest than other parts of the Kingdom”.¹⁶¹

What made the Duke’s bestowal of the new colours unique on this occasion was that the new colours were different from those carried in the past. The Duke’s speeches spoke in detail of the designs approved by the King for the new colours. The year 1802 had signified a momentous occasion for the Corps becoming a royal regiment and the original buff colour facings on uniforms were exchanged for blue, so this was extended to the regimental colours. Battle honours recorded on regimental colours became a tradition adopted in 1768 to regiments to record the battles of the Seven Years War.¹⁶² Based on this new custom, a selection of over one hundred actions in which the former marine regiments had participated were offered for consideration by the King. At Chatham, the Duke acknowledged the difficulty in selecting the appropriate honours to award the regiment:

His Majesty has selected for the Royal Marines a *Device*, to which their achievements have entitled them, and which, by his permission, I this day present to you; - a *Badge* which you have so hardly and honourably earned: - From the difficulty of selecting any particular pans to inscribe on these Standards, your Sovereign has been pleased to adopt ‘*The Great Globe itself*’, as the most proper and distinctive badge.¹⁶³

The King’s own royal cypher was added as another special honour, to which the Duke added in his speech to all the Divisions, “shall be added to that peculiar badge, The Anchor, which is your distinctive bearing, in order that it may be known hereafter that George The Fourth had conferred on you the [honorable] and well-earned badge this day presented to you.”¹⁶⁴ Next the Duke drew attention to the Corps’ own adopted motto, ‘*Per Mare Per Terram*’,¹⁶⁵ which was deemed the accurate representation of the Corps and their duties. Other emblems, such as the laurels surrounding the globe, were retained in commemoration of the battle of Belle Isle in 1761, although its precise origins are subject

¹⁶⁰ PWDRO, 1/718/5/11, Plymouth Borough records: Loyal addresses; Copy of address to His Royal Highness Prince William Henry Duke of Clarence Lord High Admiral on his visit to the port, 1827.

¹⁶¹ PWDRO, 1/718/5/11.

¹⁶² These were to the 15th Light Dragoons, renamed shortly after to the 15th King’s Regiment of Light Dragoons and later to the 15th The King’s Hussars. The battle honour was that of Emsdorf.

¹⁶³ Cannon, *Historical Record of the Marine Corps*, 48.

¹⁶⁴ Cannon, 48.

¹⁶⁵ Latin for “By Sea, By Land”.

to debate.¹⁶⁶ Finally, the problem of battle honours was resolved by the addition of “Gibraltar, in recognition of the important national services you performed there.”¹⁶⁷ The Duke closed the presentation, stating: “In presenting these Colours, the gift of your Sovereign, into your hands, I trust, - I am confident, - you will defend them with the same intrepidity, loyalty, regard for the interests of the country, that have marked your preservation of your old ones; and if you do, your Sovereign, and your Country, will have equal reason to be satisfied.”¹⁶⁸ The new emblems also continued to incorporate much of the original nautical imagery, reinforcing its existential link to the navy. The 1827 colours codified in design and layout what had been a development and evolution of emblems and honours cementing the Corps to the Royal Navy and as royal regiment; they remain in use today.

The traditions and emblems created by the Royal Marines were so potent as to inspire foreign regiments to emulation. Allan Millett has cited how the American Continental Congress created the Continental Marines in 1775 to pursue the same role at sea as their British counterparts.¹⁶⁹ Millett cites how the US Marine Corps had already by 1858 been inspired by the example of the Royal Marines’ Latin motto of “Per Mare, Per Terram” and adopted it as their own. They also modelled the American Marines’ emblem, with some modifications, to include the globe similarly to their British counterparts.¹⁷⁰ Heather Venable in her work on the identity of the US Marine Corps has shown how much the US Marines borrowed from the Royal Marines, the older and better established organisation than their own. Venable has revealed how the works of US Navy Captain Richard Collum, who argued for the existence of the US Marines at a time others clamoured for their disbandment, mirrored and extensively borrowed the arguments of Lieutenant Paul Nicolas’s *Historical Record of the Royal Marine Forces* (1846) in an effort to correct perceived flaws in the American Corps’ narrative and justification of future existence.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ To this day, Royal Marines are taught that the laurel leaves were granted. Earlier devices following Belle Isle saw the use of a wreath of roses and thistles surrounding the fouled anchor, and first appeared in 1810 some fifty years following the battle. Adding to these doubts, the Duke himself only at his speech at Portsmouth mentions “the ‘Globe’ surrounded by ‘Laurels’ – their duties calling them to all parts of the world”, while at Chatham no specific mention of laurels is made. See Donald, *The Story of Colours in the Royal Marines*, 36; The early history by Paul Nicolas cites Belle Isle as the place where, “the [b]ritish government, to commemorate their distinguished services during these operations, authorized the corps to adopt the proud emblem which encircles the globe emblazoned on the colours of the royal marines.” Nicolas does not however cite how specifically or when this honour was granted. Nicolas repeats the mention of the enemy’s reputed accolade in his account, but Gillespie’s work is noteworthy for the conspicuous absence of any mention of the laurel wreath for Belle Isle. See Nicolas, Vol.1, 62.; Cannon, whose chronology appears between Gillespie and Nicolas, cites the laurels originating as an honour for Belle Isle. See Cannon, *Historical Record of the Marine Corps*, 47.

¹⁶⁷ The single and principal battle honour of Gibraltar remains to this day on the colours and cap badge.

¹⁶⁸ Cannon, *Historical Record of the Marine Corps*, 48.

¹⁶⁹ Allan Millett argues that the influence of the British Royal Marines can be seen plainly in the early formation of the Continental Marines which would later be renamed the United States Marine Corps. Allan Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 7-23.

¹⁷⁰ Millett, 112. Much later in the 1880s, the US Marine Corps chose to invent one of its own, changing from “Per Mare, Per Terram” meaning “By Land, By Sea” to “Semper Fidelis”.

¹⁷¹ Heather Venable, *How the Few Became the Proud: Crafting the Marine Corps Mystique, 1874–1918*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 47. According to Venable, Collum not only plagiarised sections of Nicolas’s work, he also copied the artwork by exchanging the U.S. Marine Corps’ emblems from those of the Royal Marines. For Collum’s work, see Richard S. Collum, *History of the United States Marine Corps*, (Philadelphia: L.R. Hamersly & Co., 1890).

These examples demonstrate how the Corps' reputation and traditions gained positive notice abroad.

Over time, these emblems were reproduced in memorials and other imagery wherever possible. In later years, at the commissioning and installation of the Royal Marines Memorial in London in 1903, it was important to continue to evoke and emphasise the maritime and nautical spirit of this sea serving regiment which included the traditions of both the infantry and the artillery which had served so long. The Corps emblem of the globe and laurel also include the respective emblems of the light infantry bugle and the grenade for the artillery. Each corner of the plinth was likewise decorated with carved dolphins, emphasising the nautical nature of the regiment; the placement of the statue by the Admiralty buildings was likewise an important consideration.¹⁷² Erected in memory of Royal Marines who died in the Boxer Rebellion Campaign in China and the Boer War in southern Africa, it featured two bronze figures on a Portland stone plinth designed by sculptor Adrian Jones, one of a Marine stoically guarding a wounded comrade at his feet, rifle with bayonet fixed presented presumably at the enemy. The base was decorated with bronze plaques by Sir Thomas Graham Jackson depicting the battles in South Africa and China, and a Roll of Honour of the two original campaigns. On April 25th 1903, the new memorial was positioned in the Cambridge Enclosure in St James' Park and unveiled by HRH The Prince of Wales, the Royal Marines Colonel in Chief.¹⁷³

The statue, positioned immediately adjacent to the Admiralty, as seen in images 1 and 2, saw the orientation of the two principal figures apparently gazing across the Horse Guards Parade towards the Headquarters of the British Army, or at the time, the War Office. The monument was to be known as the 'Graspan Royal Marines Memorial', for the battle fought during the relief campaign led by General Lord Methuen of the besieged city of Ladysmith, where the Royal Marines as part of the Naval Brigade would suffer their greatest losses in many years.¹⁷⁴ A guard of honour, consisting of 100 Marines belonging to the Portsmouth, Plymouth, Chatham, and Eastney divisions, who were also veterans of the campaigns in Africa and China, were on parade for the event.¹⁷⁵ Among other distinguished visitors and guests also in attendance was then Major Lewis Halliday, a recent recipient of the Victoria Cross for action at the Peking British Legation from the Boxer War in 1900; he would be the fourth Marine by this date to have ever received this honour.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² WO 20/55.

¹⁷³ The Prince of Wales, later George V, who himself had enjoyed a brief naval career as a younger son of the then Prince of Wales Edward, later Edward VII, before royal duties and the death of his elder brother ended his naval career.

¹⁷⁴ "The War", *The Times* (London, England), Monday, November 27, 1899; pg. 7.

¹⁷⁵ "The Prince of Wales and the Royal Marines", *The Times* (London, England), Monday, 27 April 1903; pg. 10.

¹⁷⁶ The awarding of the Victoria Cross medal and the circumstances in which Halliday found himself in the British Legation siege were first detailed in *The London Gazette*, 1 January 1901, 3.



Image 1 – Royal Marines Memorial, St James' Park, London (Author photo)



Image 2 – Detail of Royal Marines motifs on Royal Marines Memorial, St James' Park, London (Author photo)

In his speech at the unveiling, the Prince of Wales stated:

This memorial has had from the first my heartiest sympathy, and more especially the proposal that it should occupy some prominent position in the capital of the Empire. The site chosen seems to me to be particularly suitable, for, as our motto implies that the Marines serve afloat and on shore, it is only right that this memorial should stand in close proximity to the buildings of the Admiralty and of the Horse Guards, the historical headquarters of the Army.¹⁷⁷

Placing a monument of this sort in London, and ultimately by Admiralty Arch, signified in one sense, a tangible emblem of the Royal Marines' permanency on the threshold of the government ministries. It served also, to remind the public of those Royal Marines who had recently perished in two separate noteworthy military actions which brought honours to the Corps and their military prowess.

Heroes, patrons, villains, and the Royal Marines

Significant to the discussion of the creation of the organisational identity, historians examined the prominence and importance of influential figures or heroes. For the Royal Navy the legacy of Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson, who captured the national imagination and who remains an important figure to this day of naval identity, has been the subject of extensive study by historians.¹⁷⁸ As Quintin Colville and James Davey have stated, Nelson's service in the Royal Navy was "the career of a man who brought these worlds of navy and nation together as no other."¹⁷⁹ Nelson, with the full spectrum of his complex character, service, and accomplishments still being analysed in detail to this day by historians, remains the pinnacle of British naval heroes.¹⁸⁰ For the British Army, the legacy of the Duke of Wellington for his victories over Napoleon and his long tenure as the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army resonates the strongest. Wellington's impact on the organisation and administration of the British Army would leave a lasting impression with its own consequences.¹⁸¹ In his day, he was likewise revered and 'hero-worshipped', including by a young Charlotte Brontë.¹⁸² The enduring legacy and importance of representative heroes from military service, who have transcended to the national stage

¹⁷⁷ "The Prince of Wales and the Royal Marines", *The Times* (London, England), Monday, 27 April 1903, 10.

¹⁷⁸ For example, two recent collections of essays edited by David Cannadine, *Admiral Lord Nelson: Context and Legacy*, ed. by David Cannadine, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005) and *Trafalgar In History: A Battle and its Afterlife*, ed. by David Cannadine, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006) have examined the legacy of Lord Nelson on the Royal Navy and British ideas about nationalism and British national identity.

¹⁷⁹ Quintin Colville and James Davey, *Nelson, Navy & Nation: The Royal Navy & the British People, 1688-1815*, National Maritime Museum, (Greenwich: National Maritime Museum, 2013), 7.

¹⁸⁰ Among many other works, two recent collections of essays edited by David Cannadine, *Admiral Lord Nelson: Context and Legacy*, ed. by David Cannadine, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005) and *Trafalgar In History: A Battle and its Afterlife*, ed. by David Cannadine, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006) have examined the legacy of Lord Nelson on the Royal Navy, and British ideas about nationalism and British national identity.

¹⁸¹ See Hew Strachan, *Wellington's Legacy: The Reform of the British Army, 1830-54*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); also, Edward M. Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815-1914*, (London: Longman Group Limited, 1980) 72-93.

¹⁸² See Christine Alexander, "Charlotte Brontë's 'Anecdotes of the Duke of Wellington'", *The Journal of the Brontë Society*, 35, no. 3, (November 2010), 208-214.

and psyche, cannot be understated according to Richard Harding: “In the public mind the leader as hero is still the dominant model of naval leadership. While twenty-first-century navies are fully aware of the complexity of leadership in defence organisations, they are also aware of the role heroes play in public perceptions of the force and the need to present history and the navy in a heroic mould remains important.”¹⁸³ The Royal Marines who gathered many champions and supporters in their time to either promote or save their organisation, have also lacked a single publicly identifiable figure of prominence. There is an explanation for this argued here. The Royal Marines as a sub-organisation could not hope for a member of its ranks to achieve the status of Nelson or Wellington or a similar commander. To do so, Marines would need the added benefit of attaining field command; in this period this was not possible or available to them. Instead, the Royal Marines would have to look to the martial achievements of individual members to seek heroes. This, however, proved to be another unwanted tradition of the Corps: that of few rewards and honours.

At the heart of Steele’s quote at the start of this chapter was the conviction that the Corps was overlooked and underappreciated. Ironically, Steele was in fact one of the very few Marine officers who would later gain a knighthood in 1817.¹⁸⁴ Despite this, Steele’s remark was not without foundation. The Royal Marines had difficulty influencing its public image because it rarely received recognition for its own actions. As a functional arm of the navy, its record would be subsumed all or in part in a grander record of events. As Nicolas would cite in his history, the rewards distributed to Royal Marines for their role and participation at Trafalgar were few. Honours, promotions, and peerages were granted to the elite brotherhood of naval officers, as was the custom of the day:

Amidst all these abundantly scattered rewards, only one solitary mark of distinction was extended to the corps of Marines serving in the fleet, - a force amounting to 92 officers and above 3,600 rank and file; of whom 2 captains and 2 subalterns were killed, 5 captains and 8 subalterns wounded: the brevet rank of major, conferred on captain Thomas Timmins, was considered adequate to the claims of marines, whose gallant exertions so materially contributed to the important result of this gloriously-fought day!¹⁸⁵

Notable exceptions included rare cases where individual actions called out by necessity the organisation to which they belonged. This grievance of a misdistribution of honours and recognitions to members of the Royal Marines, or recognition of the Corps itself, occurred with some frequency throughout their history becoming a prominent identifiable

¹⁸³ Richard Harding, “The Royal Navy, History and the Study of Leadership,” In: Harding, R and Guimerá, A (eds.). *Naval Leadership in the Atlantic World*, (London: University of Westminster Press, 2017) 15.

¹⁸⁴ The entry in Shaw’s list cites Steele as a “lieutenant in the Royal Marines” and “lieutenant colonel in the Spanish service”, William A. Shaw, *The Knights of England, Vol. II*, (London: Sherratt and Hughes, 1906) 318.

¹⁸⁵ Nicolas, *Historical Records of the Royal Marine Forces*, Vol. II, 15.

characteristic of Royal Marines' identity as an embattled regiment. There is evidence, however, to validate these claims. Omissions of the Royal Marines from public mention, even on the national stage, were not infrequent. In early July 1814, at the conclusion to the Napoleonic Wars, Parliament voted on a "Thanks to the Navy, Army, and Royal Marines", with a motion proposed and read by Lord Castlereagh, "given to every department of the service, by which the character of the country had been exalted, and its glory secured."¹⁸⁶ Castlereagh proposed:

That the Thanks of this House be given to the officers of the Navy, Army, and Royal Marines, including the troops employed in the service of the East India Company, for the meritorious and eminent services which they have rendered to their King and country during the course of the war.

A discourse followed recounting the contributions of each service. Of the navy, Castlereagh noted that, "although no such splendid victories as those of the Nile or Trafalgar had occurred, the House would feel that its thanks were equally claimed for services that excited less notice, but were scarcely of less importance."¹⁸⁷ The navy would again feel this spirit of competition a century later, as will be shown, in the First World War. For the army, and its commander the Duke of Wellington, Castlereagh suggested that, "the admiration and veneration of surrounding nations upon ourselves, upon our armies, and upon that illustrious individual who had taught our soldiers the art of war on so grand a scale, and had led them to the fruits of their perseverance and discipline, victory and glory."¹⁸⁸ Castlereagh concluded with thanks to the militia and to the East India Company. Taking his seat, Castlereagh then stood interrupting the House Speaker in the reading of the next question recalling that although he had omitted to cite the service of the Royal Marines, "their exertions spoke better for themselves than any language he could employ."¹⁸⁹

In 1840, a Royal Commission appointed to enquire into the naval and military promotion and retirement system cited a complaint from Royal Marine officers, "that there was an unequal distribution of brevet rank, and of other distinctions and rewards for service, and an unjust apportionment of prize money, in reference to corresponding ranks in other services."¹⁹⁰ In his testimony to the 1840 commission, Captain Willes would recall this singular distinction granted to the Corps at Trafalgar: "The great victories by sea and land gave promotion of an extensive character to the army and navy, while the utmost which fell to the royal marines, even for Trafalgar (where more than 3,000 of the corps served in

¹⁸⁶ "Thanks Voted To The Navy, Army, And Royal Marines",_HC First Series, Volume 28, Wednesday, July 6, 1814. C. 616-621, c. 618.

¹⁸⁷ "Thanks Voted", HC, C.617.

¹⁸⁸ "Thanks Voted",_HC, C.617.

¹⁸⁹ "Thanks Voted",_HC, C..618-619.

¹⁹⁰ The Sessional Papers Of The House Of Lords: Session 1840, Vol XL. From here noted as "Sessional Papers 1840". Sessional Papers, 1840, vii.

the fleet), was the brevet rank of major conferred on one captain only.”¹⁹¹ The awarding of brevet ranks was, however, a dubious distinction which would last for many years. Awarding of the rank, in fact, provided little in the way of further responsibility, less in the guarantee of any stability, and little in further pay compared to the full commissioned rank. Years later, recalling his own brevet promotion to Lieutenant Colonel for service in the Boer War, General Sir George Grey Aston would state in his memoirs that “brevet rank is of no value to a Marine”.¹⁹² Aston reflected that at this time, service equivalency in the promotion lists did not exist for brevet Colonels in the Marines and the army. A brevet Colonel in the army would take his date of promotion with them when promoted to the Colonel’s list, whereas a Marine would not. Aston reflected: “It all sounds rather complicated, and like the riddle about that man’s father and my father’s son, but the effect of it was that, when I did get on the Colonel’s list, I lost eight years in seniority compared with the Army.”¹⁹³

The Royal Marines gained acknowledgement for their accomplishments in other ways, such as the awarding of the Victoria Cross to some of its members.¹⁹⁴ Instituted in 1857, it became one of the few ways Marines of all ranks might have the opportunity to gain personal recognition, as well as honours reflected on their organisation.¹⁹⁵ To date, however, only ten Victoria Cross medals have been awarded to the Royal Marines since its inception, of which nine of the ten were awarded in the period up to the First World War. Despite their participation in the numerous land and sea campaigns of the British Empire, the number of medals awarded to the Corps is in marked contrast to the numbers awarded the other services in the same period.¹⁹⁶ The undesirable traditions of slow promotion, and few rewards and honours were therefore well established from an early period. The Corps, however, benefitted greatly from the attentions from key benefactors or patrons.

In its formative years, the Corps perhaps most impressed the senior members of the Royal Navy who for their own reasons took interest in promoting the wellbeing of the Corps. Blumberg stated in history the belief that Anson, “took the Corps under his wing”, and that “he had to resist many efforts by politicians to foist unsuitable officers on the Corps.”¹⁹⁷ As Britt Zerbe has revealed, Anson’s initial appeal as a protagonist for the Corps is far more complex; Anson was “definitely a prime mover in the establishment of the Corps of Marines, he was however neither its sole architect nor the significant

¹⁹¹ Sessional Papers, 1840, 22.

¹⁹² George Aston, *Memories of a Marine: An Amphibiography*, (London: John Murray, 1919), 212.

¹⁹³ Aston, *Memories*, 254.

¹⁹⁴ For a critical evaluation of the Victoria Cross as a cultural emblem of heroism, see, Melvin Charles Smith, *Awarded For Valour: A History of the Victoria Cross and the Evolution of British Heroism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008.

¹⁹⁵ *The London Gazette*, Tuesday, February 5, 1857, 410-411.

¹⁹⁶ WO 98, War Office: Correspondence and Papers Concerning the Victoria Cross; 1,161 Victoria Crosses were awarded from its inception through the First World War, of which nine total were awarded Royal Marines, or less than one percent of all total medals at this point.

¹⁹⁷ Blumberg, H.E. *A Record of the Royal Marines From 1755 to 1792*, Royal Marines Museum Archives, unpublished.

influencer on its structure.”¹⁹⁸ The First Sea Lord, and also Royal Marine General through his sinecure post, Admiral John Jervis, is supposed to have played a key role in convincing the King of giving the Corps the ‘Royal’ title for accession to a Royal Regiment. Jervis reputedly stated he but “inefficiently done did my duty,” in this regard, but speaking of the marines stated that “if ever the hour of real danger should come to England, they will be found the country’s sheet anchor.”¹⁹⁹ The gain of royal regiment status in 1802 was a momentous step in adding to the recognition of the Corps, but also hopes of continued interest and assistance from the royal family. The Corps would benefit further still from its connections to the Royal family.

It is noteworthy that following the death of William IV, who as the former Duke of Clarence was a great benefactor to the Corps, no member of the royal family took on the title of Colonel-In-Chief of the Corps; the title of Lord High Admiral would go into commission until the next century. Without a specific royal patron or benefactor, the strain on the Corps was palpable until Queen Victoria in 1882 appointed her second son Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, as the first honorary Colonel Royal Marines.²⁰⁰ Following his death in 1900, the title lapsed briefly until the Duke of Cornwall and York, later George V, was named Colonel in Chief of the Royal Marines, a title which he retained upon becoming King.²⁰¹ Throughout his life, George V would retain a close interest in the matters of the Corps and would on several occasions, to be examined in chapter six, personally intervene when he felt the Corps’ future existence was in peril. On March 7th 1918, now King George V, visited the Royal Marines training depot at Deal in order to inspect the training and progress of the newly formed 4th Battalion, who were destined to participate a month later in the raid at Zeebrugge. The King was alleged to have been so impressed with the bearing and quality of the recruits, that he directed in future the senior squad of recruits in training should be designated as ‘The King’s Squad’. Not long after his visit, the King further directed that the best recruit should be awarded a distinctive badge, ‘The King’s Badge’, as to be worn in all orders of dress no matter what rank the marine should attain later in service.²⁰² Both accolades remain in effect to this day.²⁰³ George V as a benefactor to the Corps will be discussed in a later chapter where his intervention saved the Corps from possible extinction.

Yet just as the Corps benefitted from key patrons, it had a great share of detractors. While many of these would come forward in the debates over their future function and service

¹⁹⁸ Zerbe, *The Birth of the Royal Marines*, 57.

¹⁹⁹ Edwards, *Short History*, 16.

²⁰⁰ Rawlinson, *Personal Distinctions*, 112.

²⁰¹ *London Gazette*, 4 January 1901, Issue 27263, 83.

²⁰² Edwards, *Short History*, 144.

²⁰³ The King’s Badge is still awarded the best deserving recruit from each training troop at the Commando Training Centre Royal Marines at Lympstone, and the senior troop in training is likewise known as the King’s Squad. For a complete listing of all King’s Badge recipients, and further notes on the history of the badge, see Major Rick Hall, RM, “100 Years of the King’s Badge”, *The Sheet Anchor*, Royal Marines Historical Society, XLII, no. 2, (2018).

potential in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, two are worth mentioning here. The first, ironically, was the son the Corps' great benefactor the Duke of Clarence. Lord Frederick Fitzclarence was the son of William IV, formerly the Duke of Clarence, through his mistress Dorothea Jordan.²⁰⁴ The Clarence Barracks in Portsmouth where the Portsmouth Division of the Royal Marines was based had been named for William. Profiting from his royal connections, Lord Fitzclarence began his military career at the age of fourteen as an ensign in the Coldstream Guards; by the time he was twenty-four he was already a lieutenant Colonel with a reputation for devotion to military study and training and the discipline of his men, both moral and physical.²⁰⁵ Reputedly, Fitzclarence approached the problems of command with the belief that his officers were fools and all his regiments in need of correction.²⁰⁶ In 1847, Fitzclarence was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Portsmouth which also gave him command of the South West military district and the garrison of Portsmouth. As the Royal Marines belonged to both the Admiralty and the Portsmouth garrison, friction soon emerged with the Marines and the new commander over his jurisdiction of the forces billeted in the town now at his disposal. On his arrival in Portsmouth, Fitzclarence scrutinised the training of his officers in manoeuvres with weekly Brigade size drills on Southsea Common.²⁰⁷ From the correspondence in the Admiralty records of the Portsmouth Division, a dispute between the Portsmouth Division and Fitzclarence began almost immediately.²⁰⁸ In a detailed letter from Colonel Thompson Aslett, the Commandant of the Portsmouth Division, to Sir John Owen, the Deputy Adjutant General of the Corps, Aslett alerted Owen of problems he encountered with the new District and garrison commander, owing to absences of Marine officers at Fitzclarence's Brigade drills and the priority in importance of orders of the Garrison Commander over that of the Admiralty.²⁰⁹ Attaching copies of several letters and correspondences between himself, Fitzclarence, and the Garrison, Aslett expressed to Owen:

...that [Fitzclarence] is desirous of exercising an interference with the duties and interior economy of the Division, as well as the authority of the Commandant, which has never before been done by his predecessors – I have to request you will be pleased to submit this notice to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, and to solicit their Lordship's further instructions for my guidance.²¹⁰

²⁰⁴ Lord Frederick Fitzclarence obituary, *The Gentlemen's Magazine*, (1855) 304.

²⁰⁵ Strachan, *The reform of the British Army*, 29-30. No work or comprehensive biography on Fitzclarence currently exists. During his life, he produced a number of volumes on military subjects. While his correspondence with various persons and military departments still exists, the existence of his papers is not currently known.

²⁰⁶ Strachan, *The reform of the British Army*, 31.

²⁰⁷ Strachan, 31.

²⁰⁸ ADM 201/27, letters from Aslett to Owen, 23 November 1847.

²⁰⁹ Owen would be the Deputy Adjutant General from 1836 to his retirement in 1854 – see *The London Gazette*, no. 21643, 13 December 1854, p. 4183.

²¹⁰ ADM 201/27.

Further letters from Fitzclarence highlight the Garrison Commander's displeasure at the allowance Aslett makes for his officers and men for passes in the town. A strict disciplinarian, Fitzclarence made few allowances for the soldiers to do the same. Yet other requirements from Fitzclarence on Aslett as Commandant of the Portsmouth Division, appeared to infringe unreasonably on Aslett's authority as a Commander and on the reporting chain the Marines had with the Admiralty. Fitzclarence requested lists of defaulters and their punishments on a weekly basis, which Aslett duly complained about to Marine Headquarters. Compelled to intervene, Owen appealed directly to Fitzclarence for remedies, including inspections at Fitzclarence's pleasure of the Division punishment books and logs in order to avoid, "the necessity of going to the Horse Guards and the Admiralty on a subject which bears upon the interior economy of the Marine Corps."²¹¹ Neither intimidated or dissuaded from a seemingly veiled threat, Fitzclarence sought a solution which he had the unique means to facilitate and implement; he would move the Marines out of Portsmouth to nearby Gosport on the opposite side of the Portsmouth dockyard.

Owen was likely concerned early on about the logistical challenges of removing the Marines to Gosport while they still had duties in the dockyard and with the fleet. In a letter to the Second Sealord, Admiral Frederick Berkeley, however, Owen seemed prepared at least for such an outcome:

Whereas I am humbly of the opinion that the Marines, being a Naval force, should be always placed in the vicinity of the Dockyard. If however it is determined to make the exchange of Barracks, at Portsmouth for the Forton Barracks, and place the Marines in a position outside the Works and thus remove them from participation of duties with other branches of the service, I do not think any better position could be found than Forton.²¹²

Gosport was still relatively close to the dockyard, and the reality of a physical removal to Gosport was perhaps not without added benefits of avoiding further confrontation with Fitzclarence. The move was soon confirmed and the Marines finally vacated the Clarence barracks on March 29th 1848.²¹³ By 1850, Fitzclarence departed Portsmouth to take a posting in India where he subsequently died.²¹⁴ By 1923, the barracks at Forton were in a terrible state and the Admiralty in a time of post-war austerity was not prepared to pay to repair. Adjutant General H.E. Blumberg took the last church parade for the marines at Gosport on 29 July 1923.²¹⁵ After seventy-seven years at Gosport, the Marines returned to Portsmouth on the 1st of August 1923, and transferred the Division colours to Eastney.

²¹¹ ADM 201/27, Owen to Fitzclarence, 7 January 1848.

²¹² RMM, Forton Barracks letters, 268.

²¹³ "The Royal Marines", *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, Saturday 1 April, 1848.

²¹⁴ Lord Frederick Fitzclarence obituary, *The Gentlemen's Magazine*, (1855) 304.

²¹⁵ Edwards, *Short History*, 47.

Following the amalgamation of the Royal Marines Artillery and the Light Infantry in 1924, Eastney Barracks became the Headquarters for the Corps. At the time in 1847, on the surface at least no lingering resentment was apparent over the move, as was the case in a farewell banquet to Fitzclarence in Portsmouth attended by the Marines.²¹⁶ Yet no details as to reasons for the acrimonious move to Gosport are included in any written history of the Royal Marines.²¹⁷ The only clue is in a history of Portsmouth compiled by William G. Gates, which allude to the actual reason that, "Lord Frederick Fitzclarence, the Governor, 1847-51, was unable to make use of them for the military displays in which he took great pride and delight."²¹⁸ The event reveals other key points about the status of the Royal Marines at this point in the mid-nineteenth century. Firstly, Admiralty intervention was conspicuously absent throughout the exchanges between the Marines and the Fitzclarence. Admiralty records are not clear, but one solution seems probable. The Admiralty concerned itself chiefly with the ability of the Marines to provide detachments for the Portsmouth fleet and their dockyard duties; so long as these were not severely disrupted, a dispute with the War Office was not worth their time. Secondly, whereas previously, harmonious relations had persisted based on an understanding and respect of how the marines might integrate efficiently around their duties into the garrison, the command relationships deteriorated in part due to rivalling personalities. The impact to marine identity was that the move to Gosport further underscored the inferior relative status of the Marines at this time in comparison to the army regiments in the town, demonstrated by the fact the Admiralty was not prepared to forego further acrimony with the War Office.

The other noteworthy detractor of the Corps was the First Sea Lord of the Royal, John 'Jackie' Fisher. As Blumberg would note in his history of the Royal Marines: "Fisher did not hold the Royal Marines in great esteem. He was inspired with no friendly feelings for the Corps and in fact is reported to have tried to abolish it."²¹⁹ This opinion was not without sufficient evidence as Fisher's efforts at naval reform would inspire periodic animosity from the marines. Fisher's views of the Marines had been shaped over time, remarking in 1897 that: "Owing the gradual alteration in training brought about by the abolition of sails as the propelling agency; the seamen have a considerable amount of what may be called military training grafted on to their training as sailors. The result is, that a bluejacket can do anything that a Marine can, (except perhaps march as well); and

²¹⁶ "Banquet to Lord Fitzclarence", *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, Saturday, 22 June, 1850; Issue 2646.

²¹⁷ Field in his comprehensive two volume makes no mention of this move, Blumberg acknowledges the move with a perfunctory passage about the Portsmouth Barracks: "In this year came also the move from the old Clarence Barracks at Portsmouth to the new Barracks, which had been erected on the land where the old hospital for prisoners of war used to stand at Forton. These were exchanged with the War Office for the Clarence Barracks, and at first consisted only of the four large blocks. The transfer took place on 29th March 1848", H.E. Blumberg, *A Record of the Royal Marines From 1837 to 1914*, Royal Marines Museum Archives, 1934. Unpublished. 124.

²¹⁸ Gates, William G., *City of Portsmouth: Records of the Corporation, 1835-1927*, (Portsmouth: Charpentier, Ltd., 1928) 298.

²¹⁹ Blumberg, *History of the Royal Marines*, 124.

in addition he can do a great deal of absolutely necessary work connected with service afloat that a Marine cannot."²²⁰ In a 1902 letter to then First Lord of the Admiralty Lord Selborne, Fisher wrote:

The only officer we can never educate is the Marine Officer...And if the Marine Officer is to be of any use to us, he is absolutely useless at present (or rather he is worse than useless because he occupies valuable space on board!), we must get rid of his military training or, perhaps better (as so conclusively urged by Sir George Tryon), we ought to get rid of him altogether!²²¹

Fisher also advocated what others before had suggested, that an eventual amalgamation of the two marine branches ought to occur as, "there is no reason at all for apportion of the Marine forces being specially trained as Artillery. The training which is useful when embarked is common to both R.M.L.I. and R.M.A.".²²² Fisher framed his views in accordance with his beliefs on the best employment of the marines in their function at sea, not on land, and one which led him to conclude on the marine artillery that, "the training of the Officers R.M.A. is a long and expensive one and there is no work that they can usefully perform on board ship to justify it."²²³

When the Royal Marines established their memorial on London, Fisher saw it as another reason why the Marines as an organisation were incompatible with the navy. In a letter in October 1905 to Sir William May, then Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, when discussing the prospects of a naval garrison at Gibraltar, expressed his opinions on the Marines and their new memorial statue. Fisher here voiced strong sentiments about the Marines:

Nothing will ever induce me personally to agree to garrisoning Gibraltar entirely with Marines! Or having a Marine General as Governor! The last end would be worse than the first! It must be purely a Naval Government! and solely under the Admiralty! The Marine Officer can't be loyal! Just look at that statue outside the Admiralty in honour of the Marines, recently put up by them! [it] has its back turned on the Admiralty, and it's looking at the War Office! The Marine Officers (not the Marines) are always hankering after the Army! D--m the Army! Another reason! If we had 3,000 Marines locked up at Gibraltar, we should want another 3,000 Marines at home as their relief, and then the total number of Marines would be so great they would cease to be Marines, as they would have no sea service hardly.²²⁴

²²⁰ CCA, FISR 5/1, 4164 /1897, "Remarks On The Royal Marine Corps".

²²¹ Cited from Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 44.

²²² CCA, FISR 5/1, 4164 /1897.

²²³ CCA, FISR 5/1, 4164 /1897.

²²⁴ Cited from, P.K. Kemp, ed., *The Fisher Papers*, Vol. 1, Navy Records Society, CII, (London: Navy Records Society, 1960) 405-406.

Fisher admitted in his letter that his sentiments expressed were not a “studied effusion”, but nonetheless insisted they were correct.²²⁵ He may not have been struck by the irony of his comments, by the fact that the principal battle honour of the Royal Marines is “Gibraltar”. That the Marines would not be linked to service on ships or any sea service appears to have been of primary concern to Fisher, fixated as he was on economies and efficiencies to the navy. He wrote that marines “at present only [30 per cent.] of their whole service is on board a ship”.²²⁶ Fisher astutely struck at a core attribute of the Royal Marines, crucial to their identity which was recognised by the Marines themselves: without a link to the sea service, they would cease to be Marines. This important conclusion was vital for another reason: if the Marines could not argue a distinguishable and distinct role to the navy, then what was the continued need for them in the Naval Service? While service organisations expected cuts to their budgets at the conclusion of wartime, the Royal Marines would face the unique circumstance of having to justify their existence entirely. Even while ships and regiments would face cuts, no serious arguments for the elimination of the navy or the army in their entirety ever emerged. Records of service, traditions, honours, were therefore not only important for matters of pride and *esprit de corps*, but on a practical basis for institutional survival. Fisher will be discussed further in later chapters. From this section, the impact of significant impact of benefactors and detractors defined some seminal moments in the trajectory of the Corps. They contributed to how the Corps continued to be structured and organised and how it created its identity. As this thesis has argued, however, the Corps identity was also fragile because its traditions and structure were based on that of the army. Introduced here before concluding this chapter is the problem of two regiments – the infantry and the artillery – and what this would mean for the Corps as an organisation modelled on the army within a naval organisation.

The Artillery and the Light Infantry - the problem of two regiments

The continued existence of two semi-autonomous sub-organisations within an existing sub-organisation, created long term problems for both a cohesive Corps identity and in fixing on a viable Corps mission. It will be shown here how the existence of two parallel organisations which evolved semi-independently, and modelled after army regiments, within the Corps created more problems in defining a coherent mission and put the Corps itself at odds within the Royal Navy itself. The creation of essentially two separate organisations or regiments within an original sub-division of the Royal Navy, would cause much difficulty for the Corps evolving identity and organisational culture.

²²⁵ *The Fisher Papers, Vol. 1, 406.*

²²⁶ *The Fisher Papers, Vol. 1, 406.*

In 1816, the Royal Marines Artillery adopted the blue uniform and other designs of the Royal Artillery.²²⁷ This followed with the adoption of distinctive blue coats worn by the Royal Artillery, from which they would be known as 'the Blue Marines', another distinction from the traditional red coats of British Infantry and the tradition of the so called 'Red Marines'.²²⁸ The Royal Marines Artillery would continue however to blend the motifs of their occupation, such as the fuse lit grenade or bomb, and that of their parent regiment into their uniforms and other outward displays. Since 1804 and the earliest instance of artillery marines, the marine artillery companies were trained in the army model with the Royal Artillery at Woolwich, then divided amongst the marine Divisions. A new barracks would be built in 1848 at Woolwich Common for the training of marines at the Royal Artillery depot separate from the army.²²⁹ The consequence, however, of training so closely alongside the army created, as will be shown in the case for Marines officers, unfavourable comparisons to their army peers in terms of career prospects and utilisation.

The navy did find an early use for these technically proficient marines trained in all things gunnery when in 1806 marines began to instruct naval officers at the Royal Naval College at Portsmouth.²³⁰ In 1832, the Royal Navy gunnery school at HMS *Excellent* in Portsmouth was made a permanent establishment which now included permanent posts and roles for the marines.²³¹ This arrangement, however, drew early criticism from Sir Howard Douglas, an artillery officer and writer on naval matters. From its early suggestion, the idea that Royal Marines might instruct naval officers and seamen was to Sir Howard, "extremely prejudicial, destructive indeed of those facilities which would be offered to naval officers to cultivate artillery knowledge."²³² This statement, as will be shown in later chapters, would characterise later appraisals of some naval officers of the benefits and demerits of marines trained in the use of artillery and gunnery for the Royal Navy.

The marine artillery would, however, distinguish itself throughout the long century, such as the siege of Sweaborg during the Crimean War with the devastating application of heavy mortar fires in forcing a decisive victory.²³³ By Order-in-Council on the 22 October 1859, that a Division for the artillery would be recognised, "for the benefit of the Corps generally, to place the Artillery Companies on a more efficient footing, by forming them into a separate Division to be called the Artillery Division of the Royal Marines with the same staff and advantages as the other Divisional Headquarters."²³⁴ In 1867, the Royal Marines Artillery finally had its own home at a new barracks at Eastney in Portsmouth, moving from Fort

²²⁷ Rawlinson, *Personal Distinctions*, 20.

²²⁸ J.L. Moulton, *The Royal Marines*, (London: Leo Cooper, Ltd., 1972) 31.

²²⁹ Moulton, *The Royal Marines*, 31.

²³⁰ R.D. Oliver, *HMS Excellent, 1830-1930: A History of the Royal Naval Gunnery School at Whale Island, Portsmouth*, (Portsmouth: Charpentier, Ltd., 1930) 90.

²³¹ Oliver, *HMS Excellent*, 91.

²³² Oliver, 91.

²³³ Blumberg, *A Record of the Royal Marines From 1837 to 1914*, 38-39.

²³⁴ Blumberg, 38-39.

Cumberland at the eastern most corner of Portsea Island. The Woolwich Division, for matters of both efficiency and economy but with uncharacteristic callousness, was abolished in 1869.²³⁵ Marine Artillery officers were placed on half-pay and men turned out of their barracks; the resulting protests provoked a scandal from which a number of the officers were reappointed and the men reassigned.²³⁶ This experience in turn would make the Woolwich Division the shortest-lived Division of the Royal Marines. The training of the Marines themselves had many similarities, but the artillery had the added roles and training of both artillerymen and engineers. The officers, once attaining more senior roles and rank, could find themselves in interchangeable roles, and much later those officers brought up or having attained their original commission in the artillery, for example, might find themselves at the head of the Light Infantry Divisions. George A. Schomberg, later Deputy Adjutant General of the Corps was one such officer, as was George Aston, a Royal Marine Artillery officer who would later lead the Portsmouth Division. The organisation of the Royal Marines Artillery, and its unique training and role within the Royal Marines, had encouraged the development of separate culture within the Corps. The Corps regarded itself as an organisation in which two unique regiments, the Light Infantry and the Artillery, would coexist.

The Light Infantry was a creation from the existing divisions, essentially renaming those marines not of the artillery. The Royal Marines Light Infantry, was reminiscent of the army organisations which emphasised a fit and versatile force, as captured in the announcement in the *London Gazette* on the 31 January 1855 which stated: "That the Corps of Royal Marines may be designated a 'Light Corps,' and equipped and instructed as such, agreeably to your Majesty's regulations for Light Infantry Regiments of the Line; this training being considered best adapted to the nature of the service which the Corps is generally required to perform when employed on shore."²³⁷ The Royal Marines Light Infantry would adopt the bugle emblem in 1856 to their uniform²³⁸, a distinguishing characteristic of similar army light infantry organisations, but there is no further evidence that any traditions such as the 'super-quick step' of the British army were ever adopted.²³⁹ Writing in 1924, Corps historian Field who was himself an RMLI officer, questioned whether or not the title was meant as "a reward for the services" of the 'Red Marines',²⁴⁰ and stated that the title of 'Light Infantry', was a "curious title to bestow on a Corps which is generally composed of men of above average size and height."²⁴¹ Having two separate organisations within the same organisational body was a problem some marines were prepared to recognise. As will be shown in later chapters, despite the high level of training

²³⁵ Moulton, *Royal Marines*, 37.

²³⁶ Moulton, 37.

²³⁷ *London Gazette*, 2 February 1855, Issue 21657, p.388

²³⁸ Rawlinson, *Personal Distinctions*, 28.

²³⁹ Thompson, *The Royal Marines*, 39.

²⁴⁰ Field, *Sea Soldiers*, Vol 2, 105.

²⁴¹ Field, 106.

and efficiency of the marine artillery, the navy could never satisfactorily resolve what to do with them. This would eventually result in a traumatic amalgamation of the Light Infantry with the Artillery in 1924, examined in detail in the final chapter, which would prove a significant organisational development for the Corps.

Conclusion

The Corps identity was developed from its earliest stages on its origins from the army maritime regiments. This incompatibility of service cultures – the army and the navy – coupled with the tacit approval of the Admiralty to allow the Marines to continue to create their own unique sub-culture within the Naval Service invited friction and further problems over time. A sub-organisation of the navy organised in part and inspired further by the army invited conflict. As cited, additional functions for the marines, such as the incorporation of the artillery, were added over time. These additional functions created opportunities to diversify but also complicate an organisation which increasingly as the nineteenth century unfolded found itself on unstable ground.

It was from this period, 1827, that the Corps gained a greater sense of itself, essentially refining its identity built over seventy years. Important emblems, motifs, and events – the globe, the laurel, and Gibraltar as the key battle honour – became firmly established at this time and have likewise survived the most significant changes of the Corps to this day. The constructed identity of the Marines was distinct from the navy but enmeshed with traditions linking it definitively to the Naval Service. Equally important to the development and the survival of the Corps was the interest and patronage of key figures, such as members of the Royal family, who took keen interest in them. The Corps relied, and ultimately would depend, on these important links to the Royal family as a Royal regiment which were especially important as a last resort to the Corps' survival. The patronage of key members of Britain's naval and royal elite proved essential as vital lifelines for the survival and sustenance of the Corps.

As a regiment, the Corps developed and maintained a reputation for bravery and reliability in a time of need, yet also one with an embattled status of never quite gaining the recognition it deserved. This remained a recurring theme as it progressed into the twentieth century and will be demonstrated again with further evidence in later chapters. The status of its members included attributions of marines as an awkward accompaniment to the army and navy, holding a poor relative status in relation to the other services, and its members as possibly uncouth or at least unrefined. The status of its members, particularly the officers, is examined in further detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. “The Cinderella Service”: Relative Status and the Royal Marines Officer

There’s one advantage about the Marine service that is not nearly enough appreciated. It effectively cures the vice of personal ambition. Lucifer might still have been in heaven if he had been a Marine officer. – Sir George Grey Aston, 1919 ²⁴²

Not without a little humour, Major General Sir George Grey Aston closed his personal memoirs about his life of service in the Royal Marines with this succinct observation. In other studies of military officers, class has been a frequent subject of much analysis addressed by historians. In the previous chapter, allusions were made to the questionable origins and character of marines in contrast to their peers in at least one novel by Jane Austen. But was there also a question of relative status among the services, as to which service was preeminent in the minds of the citizenry, as well as amongst the services themselves? The earliest Marine officers were also army officers, and once the marines were reformed under the Admiralty, the Marines most emulated the army in their organisational structure as well as their ranks. As a consequence of their origins, Marine officers especially, found themselves compared most to army officers. The argument put forth so far is that this made for a conflict between an army culture held over by the Marines and that of the navy to which the Marines definitively belonged. Introduced in the previous chapter were the unwanted traditions of lack of recognition both to the Corps and its members, poor promotion prospects, and a third to be examined here, fiscal woes. Using the experience of Marine officers, this chapter will examine the question of relative status and will argue further that the Royal Marines as an organisation suffered from an inferior status from its other service peers.

By examining the experiences of Marine Officers, it will be argued here that the relative status of the Corps worsened as the century went on, exacerbated by an unclear mission and inability to adapt to change. Specifically, this chapter will analyse the foremost challenges faced by Marine Officers - social status, wealth and education – and how these impacted their status among their military and naval peers. While these factors were obstacles for those who would be Marine Officers, these factors also had long standing impacts not only to their relative status as individuals, but to the organisational body they represented. It will be argued that the social and financial obstacles, as well as those factors arising from the relative status of marine officers to their peers, were also detrimental factors to the organisational development of the Corps.

Both Don Bittner and Julian Thompson have cited how increasingly by the middle of the eighteenth century, the Marines were described as a ‘poor man’s regiment’, and hence low in the social and military hierarchy.²⁴³ This association, with both relative poverty and a low status, had its origins in 1755 with the Marines reformed under the jurisdiction of the

²⁴² Aston, *Memories*, 290.

²⁴³ Thompson, *The Royal Marines*, 16; Bittner, “Shattered Images”, 46, 51.

Admiralty, and continued into the twentieth century. How this unfortunate description of both relative poverty in wealth, social origins, and social status came to be associated with the Royal Marines has been the subject of some recent examination by historians. Britt Zerbe cited early examples of poor pay, promotion, and recognition in his work covering the Royal Marines up to the start of the nineteenth century.²⁴⁴ This chapter will use some experiences of Marine officers from the closing period of the Napoleonic Wars, whose personal woes best characterises the common experiences of Marine officers at the start of the century. The analysis which follows in this thesis pushes the lines of enquiry further to how this affected Marine Officers and their experience of service in the Marines, how this was perceived by Marine Officers in contrast to their peer services, and how this translated and affected the reputation of the Corps itself.

Analyses of military officers and the officer corps, collectively and by individual service, have become more important in approaches of aforementioned new naval history and new military history. As Richard Harding has noted, Royal Navy officers have received significant attention, as have sailors and the so called 'below deck' examinations of their lives.²⁴⁵ The experience of the Royal Marines along similar lines of enquiry have had to date little detailed examination, offering numerous opportunities for further study. As a social elite, the records of these officers are more widely available, more diverse, more complete and consequently better preserved than those of the much vaster population of soldiers and sailors. The public and private papers of its membership, including biography and autobiography, have long been an important aspect of naval history but one deserving of further critical analysis. This chapter continues with the experience of Marine Officers at the start of the nineteenth century.

The early Marine Officer

The previous chapter noted how the organisational structure of the Royal Marines was based on that of the army regiment and the earliest of incarnations of the aforementioned 'Maritime Regiments'.²⁴⁶ It was for these reasons the Royal Marines saw the most frequent comparisons to the army regarding career prospects, pay, and promotion. In this period, however, the army retained control and access to the privileged officer ranks through a purchase system, but also nomination from the regiment they wished to enter which created real barriers for those without means or access to either of these conditions.²⁴⁷ This was also true of the marine or maritime regiments. Until 1755, officers serving in designated maritime, or marine, regiments purchased their commissions like

²⁴⁴ Zerbe, *The Birth of the Royal Marines*, 95-105, 245-251.

²⁴⁵ Harding, *Modern Naval History*, 119, 188.

²⁴⁶ Cannon, *Historical Record of the Marine Corps*, 1-4.

²⁴⁷ Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815-1914*, 10-11.

every guards, line infantry, and cavalry officer in the army.²⁴⁸ During George II's reign, an ensign's commission in a line regiment would sell for £400 to £500²⁴⁹ and a captain's for around £1,100²⁵⁰, and, in the Guards or cavalry, for considerably more. A commission in the army was therefore an important display of both wealth and social status, and for those inclined to advancement on the social spectrum, could be a valuable investment.²⁵¹ All ranks up to lieutenant colonel could be purchased, and more often than not for prices in excess of the regulation amount, depending on the type of regiment and where it was stationed.²⁵² Throughout the eighteenth century, and until 1871 when purchase of army commissions was completely abolished, promotion in the officer ranks of the army was often a matter of having the necessary funds to buy the next step up the ladder, as well as finding someone who wanted to sell out.²⁵³ In this time when the Marines formed a part of the Army as maritime regiments, which, in times of peace especially, were ordinarily liable to be reduced or done away with, the price of a Marine Commission was always less than that of the one in the Line.²⁵⁴ Marine officer commissions went for much less. An ensign's commission in the Marines, however, was worth only about £250.²⁵⁵ For those aspiring to careers as officers without the connections or purchase power to enter the navy or the army, joining the Marines was the only option available for military service if they could not afford to buy a commission in the army or obtain a nomination to the Artillery or Engineers, or for some other reason were not able to obtain a navy commission. Commissions in the Artillery and Engineers were obtained by nomination and by entrance to the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, where artillery and engineer cadets were trained and where admission was by competitive examination, which will be described later here.²⁵⁶

With the restoration of the Corps of Marines in 1755 under the Admiralty, the commissioning opportunity through direct purchase was abolished for Marine officers.²⁵⁷ Retention of the purchase system, however, would have otherwise put the officers of the Marines on a different system to their service peers in the Royal Navy. Furthermore, no

²⁴⁸ Army commissions traditionally were purchased, a tradition dating more recently in army history from the Restoration era of Charles II. At once, this served as both a barrier to entry and means of attracting the landed elite to military service. For further details on the army purchase system see, Anthony P.C. Bruce, *The Purchase System in the British Army, 1660–1871*, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980).

²⁴⁹ For the period of George II's, coinciding with the Seven Year's War and the 1755 reestablishment of the Marines, £400 was worth between £34,000 in 1750 and £29,000 in 1760. £500 was worth between £42,000 in 1750 and £37,000 in 1760 in 2005 according to The National Archives Currency converter – accessed 26 July 2017 - <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid>.

²⁵⁰ For the same period, £1,100 was worth between £93,000 in 1750 and £82,000 in 1760 in pounds sterling in 2005 according to The National Archives Currency converter – accessed 26 July 2017 - <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid>.

²⁵¹ Strachan, *Wellington's Legacy*, 110.

²⁵² Strachan, 116.

²⁵³ The army purchase system was abolished in 1871 by an act of Parliament known as the Cardwell Reforms. For further information on the Cardwell Reforms see, Anthony P.C. Bruce, *The Purchase System in the British Army, 1660–1871*, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980) and Thomas F. Gallagher, 'Cardwellian Mysteries': The Fate of the British Army Regulation Bill, 1871, *The Historical Journal*, 18, no. 2 (June 1975), 327-348.

²⁵⁴ Field, *Sea-Soldiers* 270.

²⁵⁵ Field, 270; Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 16.

²⁵⁶ Bittner, "Shattered Images", 29.

²⁵⁷ Field, *Sea-Soldiers* 270.

cash valuation existed of navy commissions existed at this time, making retention of such a system incompatible with the Naval Service. Without the option to purchase into the Marines, those who would be Marine Officers were dependent on finding the necessary patron to sponsor entry to the Naval Service and then into the Marines. Prior to the entrance examinations which included academic tests, finding a patron was the single most important and deciding factor for those seeking a commission. Officers for the new Corps of Marines would originate primarily from the army, most from the half-pay list from the disbanded marine regiments following the War of Austrian Succession. Other officers would later choose the Marines as they simply had no money for a commission in the army.²⁵⁸ This also began the reputation of the Marines as the 'poor man's regiment'.²⁵⁹ This unfortunate reputation adhered primarily to the officer class. The struggles in obtaining a Marine officer commission in this early period are well recorded in letters and memoirs, and have also been the subject of detailed examination by historians.²⁶⁰

To best illustrate the problems of officers in the period examined, it is useful to examine some examples of how these problems existed at the start of the century. This chapter will use many letters, diaries, and written histories of the Royal Marines by Marine Officers, to provide some insight into their own perceptions of their aggrieved status. A particularly illustrative example of the commonplace problems faced by Marine officers of the early period is that of Lieutenant Lewis Roteley of the Portsmouth Division of the Royal Marines. In the letters of Roteley, in addition to some other sources, we can gain a picture of some of these early challenges.

Born in Swansea, Lewis Roteley was the son of an innkeeper and former sailor who had served in the Royal Navy and saved the money necessary to purchase the Mackworth Arms, an inn in Swansea.²⁶¹ His father invested in young Lewis's education, which would later prove essential in securing a commission as an officer.²⁶² Lewis first examined a career as an army officer, but soon found the lack of money and family connections and patronage problematic.²⁶³ Lewis would enter the Marines, according to Swansea lore through an appointment secured fortuitously by Lord Nelson on a chance visit to Swansea

²⁵⁸ Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 16.

²⁵⁹ Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 16. Julian Thompson uses this term, 'Poor Man's Regiment', to describe the Royal Marines and suggests this would have been its reputation as early as 1755, and before then with the maritime regiments where commissions could be purchased for comparatively less than other line regiments.

²⁶⁰ Colonel Cyril Field in his first volume of Royal Marines history details these challenges, in Field, *Sea Soldiers, Vol. 1*; see also Zerbe, *The Birth of the Royal Marines*.

²⁶¹ PROB 11/1495/152. In his will, Lewis' father is "Lewis Rotely of Swansea in the County of Glamorgan, Innkeeper". The spellings of the family name are varied. Lewis Roteley, the Royal Marine, spelled his own name differently from his father. It is possible this was done to distinguish between father and son, as they both carried the same first name. Other spellings have appeared as "Roatley". Navy lists included both spellings of "Roteley" and "Rotley", the Marine Officer. Here, the preferred spelling by Lewis Roteley, Royal Marines, in his own correspondence and much later from his obituary is used.

²⁶² RMM 1981/435/1, The Roteley Papers, 1797, Lewis Roteley to his father in Swansea; RM 1981/435/2, The Roteley Papers, June 1798, Schoolmaster in Bristol to Roteley's father – here young Lewis' schoolmaster describes his school work to his father, "to say your son's conduct here has been altogether what I would wish would be deceiving you." The schoolmaster suggested Lewis's father "if he appears to have a mechanical turn or genius, would it not be best to put him to a trade, but if upon the other hand you and Mrs Roteley with his consent are inclined to place him in a counting house you may depend on his being very capable."

²⁶³ RMM 1981/435/5, The Roteley Papers, 11 October 1803, Greenwood & Co., London, to Lewis Roteley in Swansea.

in 1802.²⁶⁴ Following his appointment to Portsmouth Naval College, Lewis became a Royal Marine Officer assigned to the Portsmouth Division of the Royal Marines in 1805.

In Portsmouth, Lewis' preoccupation became his position on the Marine 'list', which determined seniority of all officers in position to their own rank amidst their peers. The list, and one's position on it, would become an obsession amongst officers since promotion in the Marines was only available by seniority as one could not 'purchase up' as was the case in the army. Slow promotion was at this time, and would remain, a harsh reality. In August 1805, Lewis wrote to his father about concerns over his placement on the seniority lists:

If you will look into the monthly Navy list you will find in the Marine list upwards of 280 Second Lieuts all to be made First Lts before it comes to my turn as they are all promoted by seniority. I am particularly fortunate in joining the Division at this time as there is an augmentation going to take place consequently upwards of an Hundred Second Lts will be made Firsts which will put me a great ways up on the lists provided I am entered upon the Admiralty lists from the time I passed. I am sorry to find through the neglect of the Clerk, it frequently happens they are not put down regularly as they join sometimes a person is just below 20 or 30 who are entered after him if that is my case it will be a material injury to me as it will keep me so much longer before I am promoted.²⁶⁵

For Roteley, his commission obtained, he would experience the first of many bitter disappointments of his career. In another August letter to his father, Lewis relates the realities of how the system of patronage opened opportunities for, "a Young man who had a little interest with the Field Officers was appointed over my head,"²⁶⁶ leaving Lewis to wait for assignment to another ship.

Further letters showed financial woes beginning to take hold as the additional costs of life for a new officer in the Division, even before the hope of going to sea, such as lodging expenses, for which he was compensated to an extent.²⁶⁷ Other costs included a 'fee' to the Sergeant who taught him his drill, and another to the band and the guard on his first night as mounting guard.²⁶⁸ Financial preoccupations seemed paramount at this early stage of his career, replete with lists of bills and expenses related to two distinct

²⁶⁴ The story of Nelson's arrival in Swansea in August of 1802 was told in *The Cambrian Daily Leader*, 20 October 1916. The story, as described here, would be the source for many later retellings of the same story based in part on Swansea town records – accessed online 4 September 2017:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10107/4102415?title=NELSONSVISITTOSSWANSEA> - The Cambria Daily Leader[date=1916-10-20][accessdate=2017-09-04][publisher=Frederick Wicks]}</ref>.

²⁶⁵ RMM 1981/435/8, The Roteley Papers, 14 August 1805, Lewis Roteley in Portsmouth to his father in Swansea.

²⁶⁶ RMM 1981/435/7, The Roteley Papers, 29 August 1805, Lewis Roteley in Portsmouth to his father in Swansea.

²⁶⁷ RMM 1981/435/8. Here Lewis stated: "My pay as Second [Lt] is only 4/8 the Barracks being full allowed 6/0 [per] week for lodgings money those I have got will cost me [8]. My first [months] pay will go for Fees of Commissions I was obliged to pay one Guinea to the mess (being an established rule) on my first entering it likewise 10 shillings per week for mess."

²⁶⁸ RMM 1981/435/8. Here Lewis stated: "When Perfect is my exercise I shall have to pay the Drill Sergeant 10.6 for [is] trouble. I am also told I must Guard 7s and the Band 1.1.0 the first nights of my Mounting Guard."

categories: uniforms and equipment for going to sea.²⁶⁹ When outfitting themselves in the proper expensive uniforms, officers selected a tailor who supplied the necessary items appropriate to their rank and status. However, this was usually done on credit and the tailor had to wait many years before he received payment. Roteley's uniform expenses were listed in extraordinary details to his father, totalling £42 and 8 shillings. Roteley had engaged an agent to manage his financial affairs and arrange the transfer of some £40 to pay off some of his debts.²⁷⁰

On 2 September 1805, Lewis Roteley would begin a letter to his father with, "Dear Father, I am ordered to embark on board the *Victory* tomorrow morning which [completely] ready for sea only waiting for Lord Nelson's return from town."²⁷¹ Within two months of joining the Portsmouth Division, Roteley would find himself aboard HMS *Victory* as the third Marine lieutenant in his detachment of four marine officers, led by a captain, and would indeed serve at Trafalgar. Still, the major preoccupation of Lewis on the eve of departure for what he could not have guessed would be the epic naval encounter of his generation, was embarking with his necessary kit, settling his bills and debts with creditors in Portsmouth, and the expenses for joining *Victory's* mess.²⁷² "To mess on board will cost me after the [same] of £50 or £60 a year independent of what is allowed by the ship. We have capital dines on board", Roteley wrote to his father days before sailing.²⁷³ While at sea, officers would have their basic meals and subsistence paid for, but the mess culture in the navy encouraged, and indeed expected of its members, to outlay from their own pockets monies to provide additional comforts and provisions while at sea such as wine, port, and other comfort items.²⁷⁴ His final letter cited problems in settling accounts in Portsmouth stating, "I this day paid £20 towards my Mess on Board the *Victory*. In Consequence of which I was not able to take up My Bill."²⁷⁵ His post scriptum summarises his predicament: "Please send me £5 and place to my account for having paid for two table cloths, bedding, 6 shirts, and Two Silver Spoons. I am without a Guinea to take out with me."²⁷⁶ From his initial kit and uniform list, as well as from subsequent letters, it is apparent that Roteley made economies on this initial outlay, as subsequent letters to his father request monies for items ranging from additional shirts, bedding, dining cutlery, tablecloths, linen, and other sundries for life in the Division mess and later when he would discover that he would be going to sea, and join HMS *Victory*.

Lewis Roteley would serve in action aboard *Victory* at Trafalgar as the third Marine lieutenant in his detachment of four marine officers led by a captain of marines. He would

²⁶⁹ RMM 1981/435/8, RM 1981/435/9, RM 1981/435/10, The Roteley Papers.

²⁷⁰ RMM 1981/435/8, RM 1981/435/9, RM 1981/435/10, The Roteley Papers.

²⁷¹ RMM 1981/435/9, The Roteley Papers, 2 September 1805, Lewis Roteley in Portsmouth to his father in Swansea.

²⁷² RM 1981/435/8, RM 1981/9, RM 1981/435/10, The Roteley Papers.

²⁷³ RMM 1981/435/10, The Roteley Papers, September 1805 Roteley from HMS *Victory* to his father in Swansea.

²⁷⁴ Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 109-112.

²⁷⁵ RMM 1981/435/11, The Roteley Papers, 11 September 1805 Roteley from HMS *Victory* to his father in Swansea.

²⁷⁶ RMM 1981/435/11.

be near Nelson himself at the time he received his fatal wound. His letters include a hand written report about marine casualties at Trafalgar, citing the death of the captain of their detachment, Charles William Adair, and the wounding of First Lieutenant James Goodwin Peak, and Second Lieutenant Lewis Buckle Reeves.²⁷⁷ Lewis was also injured, though not severely. Lewis secured as a memento of the battle Nelson's blood stained stockings, which remained in his family's possession for many years.²⁷⁸ With the other Marine officers killed or wounded, Lewis Roteley temporarily took command of the marine detachment. Roteley's letters give further detailed accounts of his recollection of the battle, and in later life he would relate these and other fantastic stories, such as the myth of 'Nelson's Blood' at society dinners in Swansea.²⁷⁹ For an officer short on living expenses, he would wait many more months for his share of *Victory's* prize money.²⁸⁰

Despite his active role at Trafalgar, Roteley was still without the sufficient patronage to enable him any further advancement and new opportunities. Immediately after the battle, Roteley's concerns returned to financial matters and his next assignment. In March 1806, he wrote his father in Swansea about his frustration with the assignment process favouring those with influence and patronage:

I beg you will lose no time in sending me some cash to pay wife and child's expenses home as well as some to pay my subscription towards Mess in case I should be embarked. I expected to be aboard HMS *Diana* she has been some time in the West Indies wants repairs and will remain some time here. But a young man who had just joined the Corps having a Relation of no small interest with the General was put into her. The same thing took place with respect to the *Medusa* Frigate where she made a demand on the person below me upon the Roster was ordered for that duty. I think they are determined I shall not go to sea again in any Frigate whatever. If I do not get into one I shall certainly write to the Admiralty and [state] my services and make it known to them how Irregular the Roster is kept with respect to their embarking officers out of their turn.²⁸¹

Concerning provision for his family, Lewis had indeed married young, and had a young wife and daughter who would, according to his letters, spend most of their time living with family relatives in Swansea cushioning the costs of supporting his family.²⁸² By April 1806,

²⁷⁷ RMM 1981/435/17, The Roteley Papers, List of Marine Casualties at Trafalgar.

²⁷⁸ The stockings today remain in the collection at The National Maritime Museum.

²⁷⁹ RMM 1981/435/45, The Roteley Papers; RM 1981/435/46, The Roteley Papers. See also Brian Carter, *Formative Years, 1803 to 1806*, Special Publication 31, (Portsmouth: Royal Marines Historical Society, 2005) 110, for description of Roteley's speeches in Swansea.

²⁸⁰ RMM 1981/435/10, RM 1981/19, RM 1981/435/28, The Roteley Papers. For more on the naval prize system in Roteley's era, see Richard Hill, *The Prizes of War, The Naval Prize System in the Napoleonic Wars, 1793-1815*, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1998).

²⁸¹ RMM 1981/435/19, The Roteley Papers, Roteley in Portsmouth to his father in Swansea.

²⁸² Few letters survive between Lewis and his wife, Elizabeth. Roteley had a daughter Jane, who never married. The papers, letters, and other effects of her father would survive in her care. Jane Roteley died in 1896 with no descendants and was buried with her parents in Swansea. *The Times* (London, England), Saturday, 7 March 1896; pg. 14.

Roteley was successful in joining the newly fitted HMS *Milan*, for another rotation at sea through a common practice of an exchange of duties with a willing officer, facilitated by payments and bribes to a "Person High in office" which he described in another letter to his father.²⁸³ Joining the mess was the source of more financial woes: "I am informed our mess on Board will cost us £60 a year each. They have already made a demand upon me for £30 as we are now laying in Six Months Stock." He was again forced to implore his father for further financial aid.²⁸⁴

Prize money was the hope of all sailors and marines of this era. Lewis' father would receive on his behalf in October 1806, his prize money from Trafalgar.²⁸⁵ Lewis' tour with HMS *Milan* would be brief, he would transfer to HMS *Cleopatra* at Halifax, Nova Scotia and see some small actions around the Caribbean earning him some desperately needed prize money to sort his finances.²⁸⁶ War, at least, meant opportunity for advancement, fame, and possibly some financial returns. In 1807 while off Nova Scotia in HMS *Cleopatra*, Lewis wrote his father: "Now nothing less than an American War can make up for my disappointment which we are anxiously looking for I think our government will never put up with the insults of these a set of runaways the [worst] of society whose very existence has been in consequence of England."²⁸⁷

As his letters at this time indicated, the coupled expenses of life in the mess and meagre pay which stretched his finances to their breaking point, Lewis faced the unsavoury experience of being 'called out' by another naval officer, a Lieutenant William Longfield, second lieutenant of HMS *Cleopatra*, on a stop in Bermuda:

I experienced no small inconvenience at Bermuda in consequence of not being able to get my Bills Cashed which subjected me to some insult from those on board that I was not upon the best of Terms with and who were enabled with their prosperity [and] Prize Money to command more cash [then] I would however I convinced them I was not to be insulted with impunity.²⁸⁸

²⁸³ RMM 1981/435/20, The Roteley Papers, Lewis Roteley to his father from HMS *Milan*, 30 April 1806. Roteley stated to his father: It cost me Ten Pounds to get into the Frigate...I consider myself particularly fortunate in being appointed to her on that day. Had I remained one day longer on shore I should have been ordered on board the Elephant [74 guns] Which sails this evening with the convoy for the West Indies. It cost me for a Handsome Present to a Person High in office and Trifle to the officer who exchanged Sea Duties with me who by the by had no idea at the time that this ship would fall to his lots. He has since offered me Twenty Guineas to [cancel] the Exchange."

²⁸⁴ RMM 1981/435/20, The Roteley Papers, Lewis Roteley to his father from HMS *Milan*, 30 April 1806.

²⁸⁵ RMM 1981/435/25, The Roteley Papers, 4 October 1806, letter from prize agent to Lewis Roteley, father.

²⁸⁶ RMM 1981/435/26, The Roteley Papers, 15 January 1807, letter from prize agent to Lewis Roteley, father. In this letter, Lt Roteley was informed he would receive £10 for the capture of an American merchant ship, *Manhattan*.

²⁸⁷ RMM 1981/435/28, The Roteley Papers, 15 January 1807, Roteley from HMS *Cleopatra* to his father in Swansea.

²⁸⁸ Underlining of 'Terms' is Roteley's emphasis. RM 1981/435/28, The Roteley Papers, 15 January 1807, Roteley from HMS *Cleopatra* to his father in Swansea.

The result was a challenge and a duel between Roteley and Longfield.²⁸⁹ A second challenge from Longfield was avoided when Longfield committed suicide while awaiting a court martial for 'improper conduct'.²⁹⁰

Roteley would be promoted to First Lieutenant in 1808 and stay on with HMS *Cleopatra*, fighting in a ship to ship action in the capture of the *Topaze* in January 1809, and would be present for the invasion of Martinique in 1809.²⁹¹ The surviving letters provide few further details of his later career, although he would live to receive the Naval General Service Medal in 1848, for which he would have two service clasp devices, denoting his participation at Trafalgar and Martinique.²⁹² Roteley would also experience time on half-pay, which would not be an uncommon experience for many Marine Officers. Before his death in Swansea in 1861, Roteley had the rank of brevet Major while on foreign military service abroad.²⁹³ As this rank was not a permanent appointment, it did not transfer into his retirement pension, and Roteley only managed a first-lieutenant's pension from the Royal Marines.²⁹⁴ From the Marine Lists and his obituary, we know he would return to Swansea and enjoyed a degree of fame for his service at Trafalgar.²⁹⁵

Lewis Roteley's career holds valuable examples of the career of Marine officer who served in the early nineteenth century, his letters and career offering some insights into the experiences of officers like him. We see the thoughts of a junior officer, struggling to make ends meet and advance his career. While they are but one example of the struggles of a junior of this period, they set a clear precedent for what officers like him would experience throughout the nineteenth century. Despite his early education, without the intervention from senior naval officers he otherwise lacked the necessary patronage as the son of an inn landlord to an officer's commission. We can see his concern and preoccupation over his placement on the promotion roster and furnishing his uniforms and kit for going to sea, and how pay and financial problems plagued him for much of his early career, despite any status he may have gained as a veteran of Trafalgar. Finally, we learn that despite some brevet commissions to more senior ranks, these did not afford Roteley any further pay on his retirement.

Similar experiences were found in the same period by Sir Robert Steele, who entered the Marines in 1803, and noted the role of patronage as the first step towards a commission: "A commission in the marines was only to be obtained by interest with the first Lord of the

²⁸⁹ Roteley here cites "going out" with a Lieutenant Longfield on two occasions during the same cruise. It is not clear from Roteley's letters if both quarrels or insults, which resulted in duels, were both due to the same disputes over unpaid mess bills. RMM 1981/435/28, The Roteley Papers, 15 January 1807, Roteley from HMS *Cleopatra* to his father in Swansea.

²⁹⁰ Mark Barton, "Duelling in the Royal Navy", *The Mariner's Mirror*, 100:3 (August 2014), 302.

²⁹¹ "Obituary of Eminent Persons", *Illustrated London News* (London) 18 May 1861, 477.

²⁹² The medal roll for the Naval General Service Medal, 1793-1840, also notes Roteley receiving the medal and clasps, see ADM 171/8, *Nominal roll of surviving officers and men entitled to clasps of the Naval General Service Medal for actions between 1793 and 1827*.

²⁹³ "Obituary of Eminent Persons", 477.

²⁹⁴ "Obituary of Eminent Persons", 477.

²⁹⁵ RMM 1981/435/46; RMM 1981/435/56; RMM 1981/435/60, The Roteley Papers.

Admiralty or some of his colleagues or supporters in Parliament; and my father had never as he said, dabbled in elections, or made a merit of giving his vote.”²⁹⁶ Steele would rely on another family relation, a Marine Officer, to assist in the appointment to the Admiralty Board.²⁹⁷ Steele also offers some perspective of what the Admiralty interview boards were like at this time, but also the efficacy of family connections in gaining access, perhaps regardless of the individual quality or merits of the candidate. In his memoir, Steele used an allegorical illustration of a prospective officer, a Richard Rodel, sponsored by his father who was himself a Major in the Marines:

After the usual questions, all of which the Major, (who acted as sponsor and [god father], as well as father, to master Rodel) immediately answered, the candidate was desired to place himself under the standard; when the president observed, ‘Why, Major Rodel, I am very sorry, but your son is at least about two inches below the standard’. This brought the Major to the front. He put out his fore foot, drew himself up and said, ‘My Lord, why Richard is all but as tall as I am,’ (to be sure the Major was about as broad as he was long), ‘besides gentlemen,’ (addressing the board) ‘I have a large family I was wounded at Acre with Sir Sidney Smith I have served thirty-six years in the corps; and look, my Lords,’ (turning master Rodel round like a top, and seizing him by the nape), ‘why he's got a neck like a bull.’ Their Lordships could not resist the appeal, and young Rodel was added to the strength, if not to the height of the corps.²⁹⁸

Patronage was a deciding factor, if not the sole factor in gaining initial entry to an officer commission for Marines. Other factors, such as social origins or being a ‘gentleman’, as well as education level and access to wealth and financial means would later become preeminent. Steele recalled the moment the Admiralty Board would enquire into the nature of the candidate’s background and parentage:

‘And what's your father, Sir?’ asked a thick individual, who sat on the left of the President at board. Thinks I to myself, I wonder what that signifies to you. I however looked at him full in the face, and said, ‘My father, Sir, is a gentleman.’

‘I thought,’ said Captain Gambier, (since Lord Gambier, then one of the naval lords, and who always had a kindly leaning to the church,) ‘that is, I understood your father to be a clergyman.’

The president looked up. ‘Yes, my Lords, so he is by profession,’ said I; ‘but I thought the question referred to his birth.’

²⁹⁶ Sir Robert Steele, *The Marine Officer*, Vol.I, (London: Henry Colburn, Publisher, 1840) 26.

²⁹⁷ Steele, *The Marine Officer*, Vol.I, 29-30.

²⁹⁸ Steele, 36.

'Sit down,' said the president. 'Mr. Marsden,' (to the secretary at the bottom of the table) 'give him his certificate.'²⁹⁹

In this, Steele was not too dissimilar from many of his contemporaries. As a vicar, his father would have been considered a member of the gentlemanly class by virtue of both his function and the education required of a vicar. For Steele, this proved adequate. Steele's memoirs likewise captures the tone of initial jubilation of being accepted into the Corps and receiving his certificate of appointment, followed by the shock effect of the financial obligations suddenly incurred:

"You will have the goodness, Sir," (to my father) "to leave that certificate with me, as your son has been recommended by General Averne. I shall take care that he is appointed to the Portsmouth division, and he will receive his commission at headquarters, when he has been reported fit for duty by the adjutant. Meanwhile," (in a subdued voice,) "have you any particular person, to whom you would wish to give a preference, in furnishing his equipments?"

"Equipments sir?" repeated my primitive parent, "what equipments?"

"Why his outfit his uniform his appointments to be sure, and by and by his sea kit. At least two hundred pounds will be required to start him properly."

"Then God must help me," said my alarmed sire.³⁰⁰

Like Roteley, Steele also cited the problem of the seniority list, where newly minted officers could find themselves fixed within a lineal standing with little hope of ascending to the next rank with any expediency. Upon receiving his commission, and later learning of his standing in relation to that of the 'young Rodel', the son of the Marine major in Steele's illustration who had also received an officer commission along with Steele, Steele noted:

For my part, I was so happy that I paid little attention to these things at the moment; but when the Admiralty list came out, and our standing and seniority in the corps was known, I had too much reason to remember and regret them; for some young officers who went up to pass the board, long after I had joined the division, stood above me upon the list of second lieutenants, and above them, of course, stood the first born of Major Rodel. I therefore strongly advise all parents and guardians having sons or wards destined to a gradation corps, to make their ground good with the hireling who makes out the list, especially if they are to come in, as I did, at a large augmentation, on the breaking out of a war.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ Steele, *The Marine Officer, Vol I.*, 35.

³⁰⁰ Steele, 37-38.

³⁰¹ Steele, 39-40.

Steele's allusion of either endearing or the outright bribery of Admiralty clerks cites the power these administrative persons could have over the careers of junior officers.

Lewis Roteley's experience remains one of the best examples of the unique challenges faced by Royal Marines Officers at the start of the century over social origins, wealth and education, and sensitivity over the relative status of their Corps. Both the examples of Roteley and Steele neatly demonstrate the challenges faced by Marine Officers throughout the nineteenth century in their chosen service profession: meagre pay, slow promotion, few opportunities for recognition or reward, and the uncertainties of continued employment or a retirement pension. These struggles impacted the matter of the relative status of the Royal Marines in relation to the other services, which as will be shown affected the later crises of existence and identity related to the continued retention of the Corps. With an understanding of the unique challenges an Officer of Marines faced at the outset of the nineteenth century, we will see how these problems persisted in recognisable patterns in the careers of other officers.

Social origins, education and other financial woes

Robert Steele recounted his own opinion of Marines in society in his memoirs:

As a body, no other country has a more formidable or better disciplined, or a more efficient force loyal and true to the crown, they have always been found good at need, animated by the highest principles of military virtue, governed by precepts of the strictest honour and integrity, and pursuing individually a straight path of duty to their sovereign and to society, they are entitled to a place, if not amongst the highest, certainly among the most meritorious classes of either public or private life - they may not be what I once heard a mustachoied Dandy term a "fashionable corps," but they are more - they are a "respectable corps," - a corps of gentlemen, taken from the middle, and most healthy, as well as most moral part of the British community, and are, as soldiers and men, "sans peur, et sans reproche." Still, I must repeat, a more neglected body does not exist in the service.³⁰²

The insight of Steele on the Corps in this period being at once not a 'fashionable corps', but one made of 'gentlemen, taken from the middle', is reflective of the consummate view of the Marines in this period about their status. Marine officers overwhelmingly came from middle-class families and were unlikely to be men of wealth or from wealthy families.³⁰³ By the twentieth century the question of social origins may have mattered somewhat less, though increasingly it was acknowledged that officers of Marines did not come from

³⁰² Steele, *The Marine Officer*, Vol. II, 269-270.

³⁰³ Bittner, *Shattered Images*, 46. By way of contrast, an Army infantry officer was estimated to need a private income of £150 to £200 per year, while a cavalry officer would require £600 to £700 per year. Edward Spiers discusses this and other expenses in *The Army and Society, 1815-1914*, 24-25.

wealthy families. In his memoirs, Frederick Jerram, who entered the Corps in 1901, reflected that:

It seems customary to commence any backward with the words 'I was born of poor respectable parents.' Goodness knows mine were poor and Victorian enough. I mention these pre-Corps days [as] they have a very direct bearing on my own service career and discount the very prudent idea that one could not exist in the [Service] without considerable private means.³⁰⁴

Education in the early nineteenth century would become a primary factor in deciding a future commission in the Marines. It was a simple and useful method of determining if a candidate had not only the requisite learning, but also the requisite wealth to obtain it, hence a demarcation point between social classes. In 1839, the Admiralty Board convened a new series of examinations for entrance to the Marines. All candidates for commissions would be required to possess competent knowledge that would be examined through tests to be held at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich.³⁰⁵ The Admiralty instructions of 1839 read as follows:

The following Qualifications are required in Candidates for Commissions in the Corps of Royal Marines: — Every Candidate will be required to possess a competent knowledge of 1st. Common and Decimal Arithmetic. — 2nd. First Six Books of Euclid. — 3rd. Algebra, as far as Simple Equations. — 4th. A portion of Plane Trigonometry, and the Use of Logarithms And to write English correctly from dictation.³⁰⁶

From 1839 onwards, commissions would be offered to individuals who achieved satisfactory scores on a series of examinations.³⁰⁷ Equally important, after the Cardwell Reforms of the 1870s the Corps which abolished the purchase system, the Corps would now be on equal footing with the army as to how it procured its officers, namely through admission boards and formal examinations. Prospective Marine officers took the same tests as candidates for admission to the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, and the Royal Military College, Sandhurst.³⁰⁸ Each individual listed his choice in order of preference, and the final results in order of merit determined his options: Sandhurst, Woolwich, or the

³⁰⁴ RMM 11/13/165, papers of LtCol C.F. Jerram, "Some [Reminences] In the Corps of Royal Marines", 1.

³⁰⁵ General Sir Herbert Edward *Blumberg*, KCB, Royal Marines Museum unpublished manuscript.

³⁰⁶ Commissioning regulations were published in *The Navy Lists*, published monthly throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This example cited is from *The New Navy List*, (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co.) August 1844, no. XIX, 75.

³⁰⁷ For the years 1865 to 1868, there are surviving test results. These are in a ledger listing name, subjects, scores, test instructions, and other details. "Examinations for Marine Commissions, June 1865-November 1868. Short Title: Exam." Library, Royal Naval College, Greenwich, London, England

³⁰⁸ For studies of the tie between the examinations, the public schools, and the Army, see Gwyn Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), Chapter 4. In Royal Marine officer records of service, test scores are unavailable except for those officers commissioned in January and February 1876; this information includes the number of appointments offered, number of candidates who qualified, the rank of each individual in "order of merit," and the test scores. The Marines' "order of merit" ranged from 7 to 180, with test scores from 5114 to 2408. These can be found in ADM 196/61, 189-204.

Royal Marines³⁰⁹. These tests emphasised the classics taught in and the modern technological fields of knowledge ignored by the public schools. The nature of the entry examinations required an appropriate education such as generally obtained in private schools, often followed by study with a private tutor or 'crammer.'³¹⁰ As Major General A. N. Williams commented over six decades after entering the Corps in 1913:

I had been taught Latin and Greek but no science. I was well educated. I was very confident. I was a prefect at my school, and I went to a 'crammer' for nine months to learn something of science and engineering. This just got me through.³¹¹

While influence and connections remained important, access to an education had become a necessity. Therefore, the key to commissioned officer status was increasingly not by social background or patronage, but in fact having the financial means to pay for the education which was necessary to pass the initial entry bar; the two had an obvious connection, but were not synonymous.

Despite this, commissioned officer pay was low and remained essentially unchanged for much of the century. For most Marine Officers, once a man entered the Corps, he stayed. Of the 895 officers commissioned between 1867 and 1913, 486 of these, or 54 percent retired as Royal Marine officers.³¹² A further 86 died on active service as a result of combat, and 116 from noncombat causes.³¹³ Thus, a total of 688, or 77 percent, of the officers commissioned in the forty-six years prior to World War I, ended their careers as officers of Royal Marines. Men having devoted such an investment of time, resources, education, and investment into the study of the military arts, indicated a desire to make the military service his career. Generally, he either retired or died as a Marine or transferred to another branch of the armed services. A total of 130 of those commissioned between 1867 and 1913 exercised this option. Of these, nearly all transferred to the Army, British or Indian, except two who entered the Royal Navy and six who transferred to the Royal Air Force.³¹⁴ The remaining 11 percent who left the British service prior to normal career termination, a majority of these did so on the initiative of the Admiralty because they did not conform to the expected standards of professional competence, personal integrity, or individual behaviour expected of a commissioned officer. As stated, the officers usually lacked independent means, hence their preoccupation with pay, promotion and seniority. These issues became more acute as they remained in grade years, even decades as shown, and other concerns in life such as marriage and supporting a family

³⁰⁹ Royal Marine officer candidates would also be required to specify either Royal Marine Artillery at Woolwich and later Eastney, or Royal Marine Light Infantry which was still organised in the Divisions of Plymouth, Portsmouth, and Chatham.

³¹⁰ Bittner, "Shattered Images", 47.

³¹¹ Quoted from Don Bittner, "Shattered Images", 47.

³¹² Bittner, 42. The exceptional research into the demographics of the Royal Marine Officers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be examined further in Don Bittner, "Shattered Images".

³¹³ Bittner, 43.

³¹⁴ Bittner, 43.

emerged. Royal Marine officers became beholden to their careers in order to sustain their lives and livelihoods, and had made heavy investments of time and money into their profession. With no other particular skills befitting their status to turn to, Marine Officers therefore became dependent on their careers and the elusive prospect of promotion.

Steele observed in his own memoir remarks how his new uniform provided an impact in his local community outside Winchester: "I took great pride in putting my uniform all on; I appeared in it at church the only Sunday I was at home; I wore it at an assize ball, to the great amusement of Charlotte Wentworth, and several other spinsters; and paid visits in it, to some of the nobles, clergy and gentry of the vicinity."³¹⁵ Steele clearly recalled that his new marine uniform provided him not only a new status, but also a provision for access to the local elites of his own community. Yet once a commission was obtained in the Marines, the problems of inadequate pay, debt, and slow promotion further aggravated the condition of many officers. Marine officer pay was low, and remained essentially unchanged for years. Service in the army and the navy as an officer carried expectations of outlays of money for necessary items, such as uniforms, but also for social expectations as well. The subject of wealth, inherited or otherwise, and the preoccupation over funds to sustain their own livelihoods, but also the necessary expenditures expected of officers in their lives in the mess and elsewhere, were a persistent concern. For those ultimately successful in obtaining a commission in the Marines, advancement in the Corps would be a frustrating enterprise. Marine officers also lacked independent means and their concern with pay, promotion, and rank seniority remained persistent problems which were expressed in their own personal writings. These issues only persisted with years of service, possibly aggravated when facing the ideas of gaining a family or supporting one.

The financial problems of a new officer joining the Marines often emerged early their career. Until gazetted as officers, all prospective officers were 'gentlemen cadets'. This new status incurred new costs associated with military life, namely the uniforms and accoutrements for which all officers were expected to pay outside of their own salary. All probationary officers had to have the financial resources to meet the many monetary commitments associated with their position, which began immediately, the regulations stating each, "should be prepared with a sum not less than £40 for outfit, and £10 for mess, washing, and other expenses."³¹⁶ Lending credence to Thompson and Bittner's characterisation of the Royal Marines as a 'poor man's regiment', financial matters were a major factor in influencing many to select the Marines over the Army as Major General A.N. Williams, who entered the Corps in 1913, cited:

³¹⁵ Steele, *The Marine Officer*, Vol. 1, 40.

³¹⁶ *The New Navy List*, (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co.) August 1844, XIX, 75.

The son of a family friend in the Corps told my father and me that the expenses in the Marines would be less than the other services. My father was a clergyman and I had five grandfathers who were clergymen. We were, therefore, very poor. Yes, I did consider the Army but a young gunner friend of mine advised the Royal Marines on economic grounds.³¹⁷

Another officer of the same period, Major K.E. Lawrance, would recall similar motives when choosing services:

I'm afraid that this was mainly for the unromantic reasons that it was only in the Marines that one received a [2nd Lts] commission immediately on joining and because an [RM] officer, at any rate, could live on his pay if he were very restrained in his [shoregoing] amusements and very moderate in his demands on the wardroom's wine store when on board.³¹⁸

Marine General George Grey Aston would reflect at the opening of his memoirs: "The poverty part of the conventional opening must come in, because it is the dominating feature in the life of most Marine officers."³¹⁹ Aston concluded financial woes were such a constant concern for both himself and other officers, they dominated his narrative: "The poverty part of the conventional opening must come in, because it is the dominating feature in the life of most Marine officers."³²⁰ Aston also recollected his own experience as an officer entering service in the 1880s, showing little had changed regarding the initial outlays for uniforms from earlier years:

Few Marine officers in those days had anything more than their pay to live upon, and they managed to do so by rigid economy and by relying on the patience of tailors who seldom pressed for payment but fixed their prices accordingly. It was seldom possible to pay ready money for the 'richly gold-laced' and embroidered garments and appointments we were obliged by regulation to wear; a suit of mess dress alone cost over 15 per cent of a year's income of a subaltern, and we had many costumes, but the tailor long suffering and willing to wait. I think that he looked upon the supply of clothes to us as a 'legitimate gamble', and I don't think he had to wait a long time for it sometimes.³²¹

Another officer, Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Jerram, would recall his own circumstances: "To the newly joined officer not the least of his embarrassments was one of finance."³²² On his initial expenses, Jerram recalled: "an uncle had stumped the £100 for my uniform

³¹⁷ Quoted from Bittner, *Shattered Images*, 47.

³¹⁸ RMM 96/85, papers of Major K.E. Lawrance, RM, OBE, 1.

³¹⁹ Aston, *Memories*, 1.

³²⁰ Aston, 1.

³²¹ Aston, 97.

³²² RMM 11/13/165, Jerram, "Reminences", 3.

so I was saved going into debt for that.”³²³ As Jerram would also note, despite their new officer status, the arrival of the Marine officer to his new establishment, on shore or at sea, would be furthermore be a humbling experience: “the sight of an officer’s furniture arriving in a handcart, as portrayed in one of Col. Drury’s books was a common sight.”³²⁴

Lieutenant Colonel William P. Drury was a Royal Marine officer and author of several books who would recall the financial implications of similar unwritten practices on reporting to the Plymouth Division in the early 1880s:

A multiplicity of printed instructions awaited the perusal of the officer who mounted Main Guard, and there was a traditional obligation he had to discharge which was neither indicated on the order board nor (presumably) came within the ken of the Authorities. It was a heavy tax both upon his head and purse; for it entailed at his own expense the alcoholic refreshment, in which he was bound to participate, of every sailor or soldier officer whose thirst prompted him in passing to call upon the subaltern of the guard. With half a dozen bottles of whisky, then, beneath the table in his room and discreetly screened by the table-cloth, the young officer began his twenty-four hours’ tour of duty, and it is scarcely surprising that more than one untoward incident resulted.³²⁵

In the mess, an officer might be required to live on strict economic terms. Drury in his memoirs reflected thusly on his time as a Lieutenant in 1880 and the financial burden of his own mess expenses: “Beyond a rare tankard of ale at dinner and a single glass of wine in which to drink the Queen’s health on guest nights, no fanatical pussyfoot could have been more abstemious. I neither smoked, played billiards, nor went to theatre, not because I was a prig, but because I was a pauper.”³²⁶ Frederick Jerram would note a similar experience in 1901:

In these days it is difficult to realise that everyone drank and smoke and that to refuse a drink was an insult, and not to stand your share was worse. But these hard cases could appreciate, if not understand a complete abstainer; but it had to be complete. By this means I could just live on my pay with no extras. Fortunately dinner was a vast meal which you filled up all the next day and which nowadays would keep you for a week or more.³²⁷

Even at sea, money troubles might continue to plague the Marine officer, as evidenced in the concerns over mess bills by newly commissioned Second Lieutenant Henry Woodruff,

³²³ RMM 11/13/165, Jerram, “Reminences”, 4.

³²⁴ RMM 11/13/165, 4. LtCol W.P. Drury was a Royal Marine Officer, commissioned in 1880 and retired in 1903. Besides a career in the Marines, he wrote 18 books between 1899 and 1939, plus his memoirs, *In Many Parts: Memoirs of a Marine*, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1926) cited in this chapter. He would likewise later serve as one of the early editors of the Corps journal, *The Globe and Laurel*.

³²⁵ LtCol W.P. Drury, *In Many Parts*, 74.

³²⁶ Drury, *In Many Parts*, 34.

³²⁷ RMM 11/13/165, LtCol C.F. Jerram, “Reminences”, 4.

at sea for the first time in HMS *Castor* in 1855.³²⁸ The excitement of being at sea for the first time, including stops at ports of call in exciting places such as Bahia in Brazil and Cape Colony in South Africa, resulted in his expenditures on everything from exotic fruits to a monkey³²⁹, and from his messmates the purchase of a pistol and a jacket, and from another messmate, a war souvenir of a silk shirt reputedly taken from Chinese rebels.³³⁰ These frivolities seemed to have ultimately got the better of Woodruff. The pistol proved faulty, and disputes over restitution resulted in fights with other officers.³³¹ In despair at his financial predicaments, and no doubt over fallouts with his mates in the close quarters of the ship, Woodruff noted:

I'm afraid it is all up with me now. I shall be obliged to leave the ship on account of my debts. My mess and wine bill become due tomorrow and I have no means of paying them. The only thing I can do is to be economical as possible and never get into debt.³³²

Sadly, shortly after transfer to HMS *Dart*, Woodruff would die in a horrible accident a few months later off the East Coast of Africa on 29 April 1856.³³³ Despite serving only a year with the Royal Marines, his meticulous journal provides us with a detailed look of life at sea and the experiences for a new Marine Officer in this period.

The very same concerns about spending money, on any degree of leisure activity was also echoed by Captain Alfred Burton with HMS *Alfred*. "I abstain from recreation," said Burton in an 1831 in a letter from Malta to his mother stating, "my messmates are mostly young men without a thought, and able to spend more than my income. You will scarcely believe me – but even our Midshipmen keep horses which they have purchased since we arrived."³³⁴ A ship's mess, Burton wrote to his mother, "is a most ruinous place to be for a man with a narrow income."³³⁵ Like Lewis Roteley, Burton was a veteran of Trafalgar, having served on HMS *Defence*, and served a longer career until his death in 1840. Burton entered the Marines in 1804, and like Steele, was the son of a clergyman.³³⁶ His letters to family also reflected similar fiscal concerns. In 1812, while serving aboard HMS *Rota* in the Mediterranean, Burton wrote to his sister of three prizes taken from French privateers: "I rate my profit at about 15 or 20 pounds, but do not expect to receive it [for] a

³²⁸ *London Gazette*, 23 April 1855, Issue 21701, pg. 1619.

³²⁹ RMM 11/13/43, diary of Second Lieutenant Henry Woodruff, RMLI, November 8 1855.

³³⁰ RMM 11/13/43, diary of Second Lieutenant Henry Woodruff, RMLI, December 7 1855.

³³¹ RMM 11/13/43, diary of Second Lieutenant Henry Woodruff, RMLI, November 19 1855.

³³² RMM 11/13/43, diary of Second Lieutenant Henry Woodruff, RMLI, December 31 1855.

³³³ *The Navy List*, 1856, 328.

³³⁴ Underline is Burton's emphasis. NMM, BUR-2, papers of Captain Alfred Burton, 3 March 1832, Burton to Mrs Eleanor Burton. For more on the life of Alex Burton, RM, see Donald Bittner "From Youthful Idealism to Middle aged Despair: Glimpses into the Career and Life of Captain Alfred Burton, Royal Marines, 1811-1834", in *Officers of the Royal Marines In the Age of Sail*, (Portsmouth: Royal Marines Historical Society, 2002) 39-69.

³³⁵ Underline is Burton's emphasis. NMM BUR-2, papers of Captain Alfred Burton, 3 March 1832, Burton to Mrs Eleanor Burton. For more on the life of Alex Burton, RM, see Donald Bittner "From Youthful Idealism to Middle aged Despair: Glimpses into the Career and Life of Captain Alfred Burton, Royal Marines, 1811-1834", in *Officers of the Royal Marines In the Age of Sail*, (Portsmouth: Royal Marines Historical Society, 2002) 39-69.

³³⁶ Bittner, "Youthful Idealism", 40.

long time as our agent is remarkably dilatory.”³³⁷ This emphasis of Burton’s, and many other Marine Officers, concerns over their just and expedient shares of prize money was justifiable as Burton’s pay amounted to about seven pounds per month being two to three months’ salary in prize money alone. As a Lieutenant at Trafalgar, Burton would have shared in some of the prize money for the capture of the *San Ildefonso* by HMS *Defence*.³³⁸

More unusual in matters of relative status was the nexus of affairs of personal honour involving debt, insults, or slights, which were also perceived injuries to the Corps. Marines were highly sensitive to insults, real or perceived to their Corps. Lewis Roteley had notably fought a duel over unpaid debts to the mess, but not engaging in the duel would have reflected poorly on his own reputation as well as all other Royal Marines. Portsmouth was the scene of the last recorded duel between military officers in Britain in 1845 between military officers, a Royal Marine Officer, Lieutenant Charles Hawkey, and a former officer of the Hussars, James Seton.³³⁹ The affair briefly captivated a reader audience with salacious details of inappropriate advances and an alleged affair between Seton and Hawkey’s wife emerged, culminating with a challenge and a meeting in Gosport near Browndown Camp.³⁴⁰ Of note, however, it was reported that when challenged by Hawkey, Seton had dismissed the possibility of a meeting as appropriate, that “a light cavalry man could never give satisfaction or mix himself up with an infantry one”.³⁴¹ Even as an attempt to evade a fatal meeting with the bombastic Hawkey, such a reproach from Seton was as a further snub, not only to Hawkey, but to the honour and reputation of the Marines. In the meeting at Gosport, Hawkey shot Seton who was fatally wounded, whereupon Hawkey briefly absconded. When the trial for wilful murder brought Hawkey to the assizes, the determination of the jury was that Seton had ultimately succumbed to the complications of surgery in extracting the bullet from his wound, and not from Hawkey’s injury. Hawkey was acquitted.³⁴² During the trial, however, Hawkey’s defence counsel offered that Seton had, “spoke in terms of contempt of the branch of service to which Lieutenant Hawkey belonged,” suggesting the honour of his Corps was at least as important as that of his wife.³⁴³

³³⁷ NMM, BUR-1, First Lieutenant Alfred Burton, HMS Rota to Miss Lavender Burton, 26. November 1812.

³³⁸ Paul H. Nicolas, *Historical Records of the Royal Marine Forces*, Vol. I (London: Thomas and William Boone, 1845), 345.

³³⁹ “Sanguinary duel near Gosport”, *The Times* (London, England), Thursday, 22 May 1845, pg. 7.

³⁴⁰ “The Late Fatal Duel at Gosport”, *Illustrated London News* (London, England), Saturday, 21 June 1845, pg. 387; “The Late Duel at Gosport”, *The Times* (London, England), Monday, 26 May 1845, pg. 7.

³⁴¹ “Country News”, *Illustrated London News* (London, England), Saturday, 28 June 1845; pg. 411.

³⁴² *Ibid.* Later as a Captain, Hawkey would again become embroiled in another personal scandal involving his wife and, this time, a Royal Marine officer. In 1853, he would challenge a fellow Marine officer in a duel, but this time not escape censure and discredit to his own reputation for what was apparently a bullying nature. Hawkey was placed on half-pay despite another acquittal, his career effectively ended. He died of phthisis in 1859 at 38 years of age. See Martyn Beardsley, *A Matter of Honour: The Story of England’s Last Fatal Duel*, (London: Bookline & Thinker Ltd, 2011), 88-93.

³⁴³ “Summer Assizes”, *The Times* (London, England), Friday, 17 July, 1846, pg. 7.

Promotion and Career Prospects

With the Marines now firmly under the jurisdiction of the Admiralty, for those officers who would be soldiers gone to sea, becoming part of the navy resulted in even worse promotion prospects. Because the Marines adopted a seniority model for promotion, slow promotion became the harsh reality for career minded officers. Generations of Marines would be plagued with infrequent promotion, or simply no opportunity to advance. Gillespie, the author of the early Royal Marines history, was himself at the time of writing his history still a first-lieutenant with over twenty-four years of service.³⁴⁴

Officers of Marines also frequently had opportunities to compare themselves to officers in the other services. During a punitive mission to New Zealand in 1834 to rescue British whalers and their families who had been attacked by Māori, an episode which would become known as 'The Harriett Affair' for the name of the whaling ship, Lt Clarke of the Royal Marines had other things on his mind besides the mission at hand. Marines from the man-of-war HMS *Alligator* and a colonial schooner *Isabella* arrived in Taranaki in September 1834 with a detachment of sixty soldiers from the 50th Regiment of Foot, the 'Queen's Own'. These soldiers and marines would also be the first British troops to come into armed combat with Māori.³⁴⁵ Once ashore, the weather and climate proved as much an adversary of the insurgents. Whilst awaiting orders to move against the Māori, Clarke while in conversation with his counterpart of the 50th, a Captain Johnson, learns his army peer is disgruntled over the slow promotion prospects in his own regiment. Of this encounter, Clarke wrote in his diary, "During my sojourn on this duty, I could not refrain from chewing the bitter cud of disappointment at finding myself, after twenty-five years, still a subaltern in command of such a post, yet senior in the service to Captain Johnson of the Queen's Own, who considered himself as unfortunate, as well as a neglected man."³⁴⁶ Clarke had originally entered the Marines as a Second Lieutenant in February 1810.³⁴⁷ Within four years of the 'Harriet Affair', Clarke would at last be promoted to Captain in 1838, retiring on full pay as a Captain.³⁴⁸ Similarly, in 1833 Burton, at the end of his career while serving as the Marine Officer on HMS *Alfred*, would write ironically that, "it is no recommendation now a days that an officer has seen service. The young men are only jealous of him, and affect to think if he had any merit he would have long ago have been promoted. If ever I go to another ship, I mean never to let it escape me that I was ever at Trafalgar."³⁴⁹ Burton's commentary on the mess reaction to his service at Trafalgar may not indicate any particular attitude of younger naval officers as regards veterans of

³⁴⁴ Gillespie, 1. Gillespie would later be promoted Captain, and in 1805 he would lead the Marine detachment of HMS *Diadem* at Trafalgar.

³⁴⁵ Taken from 'The Harriet affair', URL: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/maori-european-contact-pre-1840/the-harriet-affair>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 14 October 2014.

³⁴⁶ RMM/1998/51, diary of Lieutenant C. Clarke, 20.

³⁴⁷ *The Navy List*, (London: John Murray, 1822), 33.

³⁴⁸ *The New Navy List*, (London: Parker, Furnivall, and Parker, 1855), 310.

³⁴⁹ NMM, BUR-1, Captain Alfred Burton, HMS *Alfred* to Mrs Burton, 3 January 1833.

the battle, but perhaps Burton's own chagrin at being still a Captain of Marines while those naval officers of HMS *Defence* had since moved onwards to more senior roles in the service. As a Marine Captain, Burton would have held the equivalent rank of Lieutenant in the navy. Navy Lieutenants would have been comparatively younger officers, expected to have reached their rank following service and training as a midshipman by their twenties.³⁵⁰

While Marine Officers languished in a promotion rut, often for decades, opportunities for marriage and family would have emerged, and concerns of how to support these financially would have been a preoccupation. Earlier in the century, Roteley solved his problem of supporting a young wife and daughter by sending them to live with family and relatives to save on expenses for most of his career, both while at sea and even while based with the Portsmouth Division.³⁵¹ Captain William Elliott confronted the problems of pay, marriage, and family in the 1850s when he decided to marry in 1852, but had to determine to live on his salary as a Captain. Means available to him were not uncommon: exchange of ships, foreign service, and other appointments for cash. In total, Elliott between February of 1852 and March 1855 made four exchanges of billets totalling £235.³⁵² Elliott even petitioned a prospective patron in the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty for an appointment as an instructor at the gunnery school at HMS *Excellent* in Portsmouth, which he hoped would bring additional pay and benefits. "Such an appointment to me would be of the utmost importance, being a married man with a family entirely dependent on my pay as a Brevet Major", he wrote. "I shall ever feel most grateful to you for your kindly doing what you can for me, for since my marriage (now more than 4 years) I have been afloat and of course during that time my expenses have been doubly increased," Elliott implored.³⁵³ His quest for this appointment, despite service experience and qualification, ultimately failed him in this instance.³⁵⁴ Drury himself married the daughter of a vicar outside of Plymouth. His relative poverty was a concern of his, noting that the marriage, "between a poor parson's daughter and a penniless subaltern would have landed us both in the workhouse," forced a wait of some ten years from his betrothal to his wedding day.³⁵⁵ Similarly, LtCol Jerram noted on the topic of marriage that, "if you couldn't afford to marry, you waited until you could." He added: "Nowadays every junior officer subaltern thinks he's ENTITLED to marry and that it's up to the government to give

³⁵⁰ Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 96-97.

³⁵¹ RMM 1981/435/5, The Roteley Papers, in this letter to his father in Swansea, Lt Roteley cites the care of his wife and daughter with family whilst preparing to leave Portsmouth. A few subsequent references to this appear, and from these references it becomes clear that Roteley relied on a family network to care for his family while deployed.

³⁵² Bittner, "OP²: Operational, Professional, and Personal Concerns of Royal Marine Officers, 1803-1866", *Officers of the Royal Marines In the Age of Sail*, (Portsmouth: Royal Marines Historical Society, 2002) 140.

³⁵³ NMM, JOD/31, Journal of Captain William P. Elliott, copy of letter from Elliott, July 1856.

³⁵⁴ Bittner, "OP²", 141.

³⁵⁵ Drury, *In Many Parts*, 191.

him the means to do so. But in those days, the government paid us for commanding our men, and not a whole family.”³⁵⁶

Naval sinecure and the ‘Blue Colonels’

If the realities of slow promotion were harsh, harsher still might have been an unfortunate practice instituted by the Admiralty at the time of the 1755 reconstitution of the Marines, that of naval sinecure roles in the Royal Marines. Known colloquially as the ‘Blue Colonels’, Gillespie highlighted this practice in his earliest history where the Admiralty bestowed sinecure ranks in the Marines to senior naval officers: admirals as generals, and post-captains as colonels within the Marine Divisions of Portsmouth, Plymouth, and Chatham. The term as such did not infer any connection to the blue uniforms attributed to the artillery of the time, and later to the blue coats of the Royal Marine Artillery, known as the ‘Blue Marines’. Instead, it reflected the connection of the officer to the Royal Navy and his blue naval uniform in contrast to that of the red coat of the Marines. While holding no particular operational function, the rank and role was designed as a sinecure to which no duties or command authority were assigned. These positions served as emoluments and provided a considerable stipend to a select few. Noteworthy beneficiaries included the likes of Nelson, Collingwood, Howe, Cockburn, as well as Jervis and the Duke of Clarence.³⁵⁷ Gillespie cited his disdain for this practice as follows:

Disclaiming every prejudice, I am led to ask how far either policy or justice can sanction the transmission of such an institution to posterity? They were originally the benevolent grants of a grateful Monarch, to distinguished individuals. As such indeed they have continued to be; but experience has [shewn], that Field Officers are the very life of discipline, and that if so respectable an addition were [unalienated] from the active members of the Corps, this principle would be still more animated. A man who suppresses his feelings upon any that demands them is unworthy of the name. How is the thought, that the Marine Veteran, who ascends by the rules of slow gradation, can never reach the summit of his profession! ³⁵⁸

This articulation of a long-standing grievance against the Admiralty by serving Marine officers punctuates Gillespie’s narrative, and calls sympathetic readers to the plight of career officers. To Marines, the naval officers that were granted these promotions within the Marine hierarchy were an affront to many whose prospects for advancement were consequently dim.³⁵⁹ There were some sympathetic voices in the press of the day. One

³⁵⁶ RMM 11/13/165, Jerram, “Reminences”, 70.

³⁵⁷ HC Deb, 14 February 1833, vol 15, c. 687.

³⁵⁸ Gillespie, *An historical review of the Royal Marine Corps*, 144.

³⁵⁹ In the case of Gillespie, at the time of his own research and compiling of his history of his Corps, he was at once petitioning the Admiralty for retirement on full pay, being the senior-most first lieutenant and, by his own description, the oldest First Lieutenant in the Corps. His agitation on remedies to Corps grievances, but also the dedication of his book to the Duke of Clarence, ultimately assisted with his own promotion to Captain in the same year, and the appointment of his

author, signing simply as 'A Friend to The Marine Corps', cited what the morale of the marine officer corps concerning this predicament: "What zeal can an Officer have, I would ask, who after more than a quarter of a century spent in defence of his King and country still remains a Subaltern? What must be his feelings at the neglect he has experienced, conscious of having merited treatment, very far different."³⁶⁰ Another dissenting voice stated in the 1830 *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*:

The Officers of the Marines only ask that they may be placed on a level in point of promotion with the Artillery and Engineers, who like themselves rise by seniority; in short they only ask for justice, they require nothing more, yet strange to say even this is denied them, and I cannot better prove the truth of this assertion, than by stating that many of the Captains actually serving, have been more than 34 years; the First Lieutenants more than 25 years; and the Second Lieutenants more than 18 years in the service.³⁶¹

The sinecure naval roles would be struck down in a session of Parliament on 14 February 1833, but ironically with few impassioned speeches about the injustices against the Corps. Instead the vote seemed motivated by the blunter instrument of fiscal reform. The debates on the motion for the stoppage of sinecures and pensions, opened with the Member of Parliament for Middlesex, Sir Joseph Hume, a frequent sceptic of the naval estimates brought before Parliament and a champion of reform, stating: "The state of the country loudly demanded the most rigorous economy on the part of the Government; and the Parliament were bound to relieve the country from its present burthens."³⁶² The pensions and sinecure roles of the army and navy were in fact a principal target for this motion. First Lord of the Admiralty Sir James Graham stated that for the Admiralty sinecure roles were: "Narrowed to the propriety of continuing to have two Generals of Marines, four Colonels of Marines, a Vice-admiral, and a Rear-admiral of England. The whole amount of salary received by the whole of these officers was [£4,740]."³⁶³ However small the sum, Sir James stated that if called for, it was the duty of the House to strike this sum from the Admiralty books. The House divided, the ayes came to 232, the noes 138. A majority vote of 94 put to an end the long honours tradition of naval sinecure roles in the Royal Marines.³⁶⁴ The sinecure roles of the 'blue colonels' system would finally be struck down, in part, as a fiscal concern. Reflecting on this moment in his 1845 history of the Royal Marines, Lt Paul Nicolas stated:

own son, James Gillespie, to Second Lieutenant. For Gillespie, the system of patronage in the end proved beneficial to both him and his family.

³⁶⁰ *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, November 1, 1830, Issue 1621, 6.

³⁶¹ *Hampshire Telegraph*, 6.

³⁶² HC Deb, 14 February 1833, vol 15, cc660-713, c. 660.

³⁶³ HC Deb, 14 February 1833, vol 15, c. 687.

³⁶⁴ HC Deb, 14 February 1833, c. 713-716.

Thus terminated an iniquitous system which, in spite of earnest and respectful remonstrance, had continued in force seventy-four years; for however deserving the gallant officers of the navy undoubtedly were to the rewards from the nation, it was unjustifiable to take this emolument from a corps that was so eminently entitled to consideration and recompense from its important services.³⁶⁵ While the system was finally discontinued in 1833, the incumbent generals retained their ranks into retirement until their death; the last four naval captains who served as colonels did so until 1837.³⁶⁶

Execution of the abolition of sinecure would be recognised with an Order in Council of 1837, stating ceasing further appointments and for the future distribution of “the amount of £2,700 shall be appropriated to the creation of 18 pensions of £150 per annum for officers of the rank of captain in the navy, and general officers, or colonels of marines, to be held by them in the same way, but to cease on their promotion or appointment to service.”³⁶⁷

The 1840 Commission and relative status

Promotion prospects, even with the abolition of sinecure posts, did not much improve for senior officers. So far from diaries, letters, and memoirs of marine officers, we can see the depths to which this preoccupation weighed upon them. In 1840, a Royal Commission was appointed “to ascertain the comparative situation of the officers of each branch ...service, the object of that inquiry being ... to compare the relative ranks of the naval and military services with reference to their pay, and the prospects open to them of promotion or retirement.”³⁶⁸ The impetus for this investigation stemmed from years of grievances in both the army and the navy about promotion rates, career prospects, and commensurate pay which had not been examined since the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars.³⁶⁹ Estimates and costs for the maintenance were a recurring feature of Parliamentary proceedings, requiring the vote on the continued expenditures to defend the realm. Many of these problems stemmed from the grievances that had been aired for many years, from both the army and the navy, though for the navy not quite resolved by the abolition of naval sinecure. Each service was examined in detail and the findings were published in the Sessional Papers of the House of Lords, 1840, examined reports from commissioners into the naval and military promotion and retirement system across the army and the navy. Specifically to the Marines, the commission had first directed its attention to the Marines. The complaints which the officers of your Majesty's Royal Marine forces preferred were:

³⁶⁵ Nicolas, *Historical Records of the Royal Marine Forces*, Vol. I, xxiii.

³⁶⁶ Donald, “The ‘Blue Colonels’ of Marines”, 53.

³⁶⁷ “Order in Council, 1837”, Board of the Admiralty, dated 12 June 1837, respecting the Distribution of the Rewards for distinguished Service.

³⁶⁸ The Sessional Papers Of The House Of Lords: Session 1840, Vol XL. From here noted as “Sessional Papers 1840”, iv.

³⁶⁹ Sessional Papers 1840, iii-iv, lxix.

1st. That the number of field officers allowed to the corps was insufficient:

2dly. That the promotion was unusually slow:

3dly. That there was an unequal distribution of brevet rank, and also an unequal apportionment of prize money, as compared with corresponding ranks in other military corps : and

4thly. That the captains of Marines were paid at a lower rate than the captains of the Army or the Ordnance.³⁷⁰

Each of these grievances had been compiled over a long reported period, and ten Marine Officers representing both the Royal Marine Light Infantry and the Royal Marine artillery were interviewed and their statements recorded in the minutes of evidence.³⁷¹ The commission acknowledged the first grievance as admission of fact, but stating that the 1837 Order in Council which recognised the abolition of naval sinecure had largely remedied this. The first grievance also underscored the problem of employment, or under-employment, of how the Marines were fielded and what role a field officer might play. While council acknowledged that the Marines might be deserving of an additional number of field officers of higher ranks to allow career progression, the council nevertheless concluded that, “The result of this evidence was to confirm us in the opinion that field-officers were not essentially required for ordinary sea-service, and that the existing establishment of the corps furnished sufficient numbers for home duties, or for those extraordinary occasions where it might be necessary to employ anybody of Marines ashore.”³⁷² Fundamentally, there was a problem with the role and how Marines were employed that was yet to be answered.

The council in their questioning posed a question to two Marine officers, Captain J.I. Willes and First Lieutenant James Buchanan serving the artillery: “Had you entered the regiment of royal artillery on the same day that you came into the marines, what would have been your position in the regiment?”³⁷³ Marine officers in the Royal Marines Artillery would have been trained at Woolwich with the Royal Artillery, and would have served in certain capacities alongside them in similar roles. Willes, who entered the Marines in 1804, and was by then a Captain of nine years, replied to the Council he would have been at least equal to a Brevet Major that was currently serving in the Royal Artillery, who had fourteen years less service than he. Willes was also questioned as to what rank he might hold in the Royal Engineers had he entered service in that Corps the same day he entered the Marines. “Regimental or lieutenant-colonel”, replied Willes.³⁷⁴ Buchanan,

³⁷⁰ Sessional Papers 1840, v.

³⁷¹ Sessional Papers 1840, Vol XL, 3. One of the officers examined was Captain Alfred Burton, see pp. 14-18.

³⁷² Sessional Papers, 1840, vi.

³⁷³ Sessional Papers, 1840, 18.

³⁷⁴ Sessional Papers, 1840, 18.

having entered service in 1814, stated: "I should have been a first-lieutenant in two years from the time of entering the service, and should now be a captain of three years' standing, whereas, in my own corps, I am 28 down the first-lieutenants' list."³⁷⁵ The best option for promotion in the army remained primarily through the purchase system, although promotion by simple seniority was still possible. Addressing the reported slow promotion grievance, the council succinctly concluded with a statement that "we are of opinion that the promotions which have followed upon that order, have effected a very material improvement in this respect."³⁷⁶

The third finding of the 1840 Royal Commission cited the "complaint upon which the officers of Marines prayed for inquiry into their condition, was, that there was an unequal distribution of brevet rank, and of other distinctions and rewards for service, and an unjust apportionment of prize money, in reference to corresponding ranks in other services."³⁷⁷ Addressing the third grievance regarding disproportionate prize money and brevet rank, underscored a concern voiced by Marines regarding not only tangible reward but also a belief that their relative status in the navy, and to an extent the army, was not sufficiently recognised. This matter of appropriate honours and distinctions would persist throughout the century, as will be shown. To the fourth point, the council sought to address the difference in pay of Marine captains to those of the army. The council proposed the origin of this from "part of the emoluments of an infantry captain consisted of an annual allowance of £20", which was alleged to have formed a fund to cover the expenses of recruiting.³⁷⁸ The council determined to correct this, stating "it is expedient that the pay of the captains of Marines, when serving ashore, should be fixed at the same rates as that of the captains of infantry of the line."³⁷⁹

The sum of these problems affected the relative status of the Corps in relation to the navy and the army. The findings of the commission in their examinations and conclusions seemed to underscore problems that were known, at least to Marines themselves, but that in some cases had no ready solutions. Notably, pay and promotion, or rather the slow rate of promotion and the absence of any tangible senior roles for field officers, were addressed with some proposed solutions. For more senior officers, there were few if any opportunities for operational command. As Colonel John Tatton Brown of this period cited: "The Marine have not command of any sort, nor any prospects of anything to stimulate them."³⁸⁰ The Division system did not allow for Royal Marine formations in the field. The unresolved problems were in fact part of a greater problem, which was related to the

³⁷⁵ Sessional Papers, 1840, 25.

³⁷⁶ Sessional Papers, 1840, vi.

³⁷⁷ Sessional Papers, 1840, vii.

³⁷⁸ Sessional Papers, 1840, viii.

³⁷⁹ Sessional Papers, 1840, ix.

³⁸⁰ Colonel John Tatton Brown, RM, personal papers, cited from Don Bittner, "A Life in the Corps: The Military Career of General John Tatton Brown, CB, Royal Marines, 1811-1870", in *Officers of the Royal Marines In the Age of Sail*, (Portsmouth: Royal Marines Historical Society, 2002) 66.

function and role of the Marines in the service of the nation. Aston concluded in his own memoirs years later that matters in the early twentieth century remained unchanged: “A Marine, as I think I have shown, has no prospects whatever in the Naval Service when he gets beyond a certain rank, because, with the best of intentions in the world, the Admiralty have no suitable responsible work to give him.”³⁸¹

Conclusion

Later in the century, Sir George Aston cited a dinner party in London while working at the Admiralty in the late 1880s, where the relative status of the Royal Marines to other services of the period was reflected by one dinner guest: “I was sitting between my host and a lady who, not knowing to what Service I belonged, and by way of putting me at ease, told me that a nephew of hers had gone into the Marines and ‘Wasn’t it a pity?’ Only a severe kick in the ankle from my host stopped my tongue and saved the harmony of the evening.”³⁸²

Despite the decision to retain and elevate the Marines to royal regiment status, the Corps was largely a marginalised entity within the larger construct of the Royal Navy. Despite this, marines since their renewed inception had begun to cultivate their own unique culture within their organisation – they had begun to see themselves as a thing apart. The nineteenth century saw the increased professionalism of the military services. For those who did enter the Marines, service meant slow promotion, and association with an inferior status within the military hierarchy. The paralytic promotion rate of marine officers during this period, and the sinecure of appointing naval captains and admirals to ‘blue colonels’ and generals of marines respectively, at the expense of promoting marine officers was an early grievance, but also embodied a tangible instance of an obstacle to career-minded men in military service and those who sought to better themselves in the social hierarchy. If the system of sinecure roles in their organisation signified to the Marines the hold the Admiralty had on them, ultimately what enabled the Royal Marines to develop and thrive was their own sense of a unique identity apart.

The personal correspondence, private journals, histories written by members of the Corps, and published memoirs of Marines across the era reflect a continuous concern on such matters. Their views collectively straddle two centuries and saw great changes to the Naval Service. As shown, the Royal Marines officers though not of great wealth, could find a career of value to society, gain social acceptability, provide themselves and their family

³⁸¹ Aston, *Memories*, 232.

³⁸² Aston, 87-88. The exact date of this event is not noted, but this anecdote is noted in his chapter, “The Admiralty in the Eighties” to which he was assigned in 1886 and appears before Aston’s description of the 1887 Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

some level of economic sustenance, and even in rare cases a vehicle for upward social mobility. The Royal Marines were not a haven for the social and economic elite of Britain

Chapter 4. “A useful and efficient body of men”

The marines are a useful and efficient body of men, second to none in the service of the State; they are excellent troops, both as artillerymen and infantry, and are at the same time capable of performing many of the deck duties of a ship of war. – quoted from the House of Commons, “Royal Commission to inquire into best Means of manning Navy”, 1859 ³⁸³

The Royal Marines were able to codify to a great extent their traditions and identity in the early nineteenth century, ascending in status to a Royal Regiment in 1802. The century which followed the close of the Napoleonic Wars would give the Corps less to celebrate. Little change occurred to their actual employment, and the Corps experienced the contractions to their service as did the navy and the army. By the mid-nineteenth century, when the advent of steam technology was beginning to take its effect on the Royal Navy and its future, questions abounded about the continued relevance of the Royal Marines. At one time, the Marines enjoyed a certain status within the Royal Navy as the only service with fixed term enlistments and other predictable measures to their patterns of life, in dockyard barracks, duty at sea and ashore, and a professional system for advancement and training. While previously the navy had relied on methods of both enticement and impressment to man the fleet, new pathways for professional skills and specialisation in occupations from seamanship to gunnery were now on offer with fixed term enlistments. For the Marines, the time-honoured role of that of shipboard police force, keeping both order and discipline at sea and a thin red line between the officers of the fleet and would-be mutinous men below decks was now considered redundant. Lacking major confrontations at sea, naval warfare became the subject of much theory. Technology likewise saw improvements to naval gunnery and reforms to the navy itself. With the rapid expansion of the empire, the necessity of seapower, articulated by such thinkers as Alfred T. Mahan, was viewed as essential to British dominance at sea and seemed a foregone conclusion.³⁸⁴ For Britain to continue to rule the waves, a large fleet of ships was argued by some to control the sea lanes were what was important.

This chapter examines the operational role of the Royal Marines where by the mid-nineteenth century, naval engagements were no longer the norm as Britain held the world’s strongest navy. Instead, colonial conflicts and ‘small wars’ dominated the

³⁸³ “Royal Commission to inquire into best Means of manning Navy”, (London: George E. Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1859), xi. Hereafter cited as “RC 1859”

³⁸⁴ The works of Alfred Thayer Mahan had a profound impact on how naval strategists and navies understood the implementation of naval power using large fleets. These works included, A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Seapower upon History, 1660-1763*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1890); A.T. Mahan, *Sea Power in its relation to the War of 1812*, Vols. I, II, (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1905). While increasingly rare at the time of Mahan’s historical study, the impact of a single major sea battle on a campaign or outcome of a war, according to Mahan, was not be understated. As a proponent of the decisive sea battle, Mahan stated: “military wisdom and economy, both of time and money, dictate bringing matters to an issue as soon as possible upon the broad sea, with the certainty that the power which achieves military preponderance there will win in the end”, Mahan, *The Influence of Seapower upon History*, 416-417.

nineteenth century. Here a solution for the Royal Marines might have been solved by utilising their training and martial prowess as 'soldiers of the sea' with the naval brigades landed ashore for strikes and raids from ships in littoral regions. Culminating with a noteworthy example of an obscure battle in the Boer War, this chapter will show why even opportunities with the naval brigade increased tensions with the navy up to the time of the First World War. The chapter concludes with an appraisal of the Corps struggling to hold on to its identity and role in the navy, while also examining opportunities to adapt and innovate new missions to be seized upon.

Significant reorganisations were considered as consequences of technology, the experiences of war, and how the military services sought to define their roles in imperial defence. The start of the nineteenth century saw Britain as the dominant naval power in Europe, and by extension the world. The unequivocal defeat of the French fleet at Trafalgar resulted in the Royal Navy remaining virtually unchallenged, with no ascendant naval powers immediately in sight. With this new status, invariably the perils remained of a change in the status quo, some rising power staking this claim with a larger or more capable fleet. While the so-called *Pax Britannica* of the nineteenth saw conflict, naval battles were the exception and therefore naval theory and the employment of naval power were much debated. This period has also been largely defined as the pre-dreadnought era, of which Arthur J. Marder's *British Naval Policy 1880-1905: The Anatomy of British Sea Power*,³⁸⁵ inspired a proliferation of work by historians on ship design, navalist writers and pressure groups, as well as political and diplomatic influences to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

British policy toward shipbuilding was to match in numbers and in capability the two next competitors. Following frenetic shipbuilding across the globe, Britain ended the century maintaining its self-imposed two-power standard versus Europe's other naval powers: France and Russia. However, the ascendant navies of the United States, Japan, and Germany had altered the balance of naval power and directly challenged Britain's supremacy at sea. John Beeler in his analysis of British naval policy in the mid-nineteenth century has emphasised the political, economic, and foreign relations contexts which framed British naval policy in this period.³⁸⁶ Beeler has cited how while the Royal Navy managed to outperform the British army in the Crimean War, the calls for reform which affected the army had repercussions for the navy as well.³⁸⁷ The challenge of the technological factors associated with steam ships and the vast number of intervening sea lanes which were the arteries of the empire challenged the view of 'Fortress England'.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁵ Arthur J. Marder, *British Naval Policy 1880-1905: The Anatomy of British Sea Power*, (London: Putnam & Co., 1940)

³⁸⁶ John Beeler, *British Naval Policy in the Gladstone-Disraeli Era, 1866-1880*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997)

³⁸⁷ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, 42-43.

³⁸⁸ John Beeler, "Steam, Strategy and Shurman: Imperial Defence in the Post-Crimean Era, 1856-1905", from *Far Flung Lines: Studies in Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Shurman*, ed. Keith Neilson and Greg Kennedy, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997) 31.

At the same time, the very idea that Britain must be a fortress was being challenged, and as will be explored in this chapter and the next, some naval thinkers and military strategists saw the potential that a strong surface fleet and a mobile seaborne force might have in the defence of the nation.

Andrew Lambert in his most recent work, *Seapower States*, argues that Britain's identity as a "seapower" experienced a period of erosion in the later 1800s of its naval power due to lack of political support at the expense of domestic reforms.³⁸⁹ Accordingly, Don Leggett has re-examined technological change in the Royal Navy citing the authority of different approaches to ship design in the age of steam.³⁹⁰ Leggett has argued how Britain's navy was supported by vast amounts of public money on ships and dockyards, though not always with the greatest interest in design.³⁹¹ Leggett notes how expenditures on naval spending steadily increased between 1831 and 1906, from £5.3 million or 10.21% of the public expenditure to £33.3 million or 22.65% respectively.³⁹² Clearly naval expenditures continued, but Lambert cites that only towards the end of the century did a wave of populist navalism, backed by a high-profile media and political agenda, bring back concerns over Britain's losing its naval edge.³⁹³ This, Jan Rieger has argued convincingly, was in part responsible for the competitive race of Britain and Germany through the cult of the navy in both countries.³⁹⁴ With the navy recognised as central to the identity of Britain and as a manifestation of imperial power, strong navies were opportunities to display power as well as symbols of national pride. What these authors have demonstrated is the navy's focus in this period on ships and design. Absent from these works and other scholarship on the evolving role of the Royal Navy in this period beyond ships and fleets is what role the Royal Marines did or might occupy. How these changes would in turn affect naval manning was a developing concern and for the Marines, as will be shown, was a predicament which increasingly underscored a problem in their purpose and utilisation.

Marines feature now, as they did then, in the margins of many operational histories, especially those of the wars of empire and their unique participation with the naval brigades. British power was projected from the sea, despite the absence of sea battles, with the navy employed in the littoral regions and colonial wars of its expanding empire. The naval brigades, sailors led by naval officers, were landed to conduct punitive missions and in many cases to support the land operations of the army.³⁹⁵ These were the opportunities for naval officers to distinguish themselves in a time when sea battles were

³⁸⁹ Andrew Lambert, *Seapower States*, 295.

³⁹⁰ Don Leggett, *Shaping the Royal Navy: Technology, Authority and Naval Architecture, c. 1830–1906* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2015) 3.

³⁹¹ Leggett, *Shaping the Royal Navy*, 2.

³⁹² Leggett, 2.

³⁹³ Lambert, *Seapower States*, 295.

³⁹⁴ Jan Rieger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁹⁵ For an extensive discussion of this topic, see *Seapower ashore: 200 years of Royal Navy operations on land*, edited by Peter Hore, (London: Chatham Publishing, 2001).

not available and for the navy to demonstrate a wider range of operational uses. The formative experiences for many officers of the Royal Navy were in fact in these small wars, to which the Royal Navy played an essential role. Admiral Beatty of Jutland fame took part in two such campaigns as a younger officer, commanding a Nile river gunboat from 1896 to 1898, and the naval brigade of HMS *Barfleur* during the Boxer Rebellion at Tientsin during which he was wounded.³⁹⁶ Historians have largely failed to question the paradoxical relationship between the pairings of the marines, trained as a military fighting unit on the infantry model, and the navy sailors trained to man ships and led by officers schooled in all things nautical, but arguably 'at sea' on military matters on land. This chapter will include a detailed analysis of this problem revealing how this created real tension within the Royal Navy and questions about its operational efficiency.

The changing navy and the problem of naval manning

Since the accession of the marines as a Royal Regiment in 1802, the Royal Marines found the years that followed the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars just as eventful. Corps historian H.E. Blumberg recorded in his history that, "It is customary to speak of the period 1815 to the Crimean War 1854 as a period of 40 years' peace, but as we have already seen this did not apply to the Corps, and the accounts of the following operations will show that the Corps was never really free from active service."³⁹⁷ The bombardment of Sweaborg in the Crimean War, where the Royal Marines Artillery would play an important role in the last and largest use of mortars by the Royal Navy, would be another such notable action.³⁹⁸ Blumberg thus informed readers of the Corps history that Britain's ventures in both colonial and foreign intervention were occasions for smaller scale and limited conflicts, but conflicts nonetheless where marines were very much involved.

Steam technology and manning of the fleet preoccupied the Royal Navy by the mid-century. Soon, traditional rivals such as France would put steam ships to sea, adopting a technology that no longer required fleets to depend on the tides and winds. While steam freed ships from reliance on the wind, it also tied them to coal depots, a fact fraught with logistical concerns for a strategy of naval blockade that had worked well in previous conflicts, and problems for defence of a global empire.³⁹⁹ In addition, the incidence of maintenance, both routine and for major overhauls, increased dramatically for steam driven ships, in contrast to their largely self-sufficient sailing ship forebears. Steam powered ships would be continually reliant on the coal depot, the dry-dock, and the repair yard. By 1870, not only would it cost Britain far more to keep an adequate force at sea,

³⁹⁶ Richard Brooks, "Admiral Beatty and Brown Water: The Sudan and China, 1896-1900", in *Seapower Ashore*, edited by Peter Hore, (London: Chatham Publishing, 2001) 164.

³⁹⁷ Blumberg, *Royal Marines*, 24.

³⁹⁸ Andrew Lambert, "Under the Heel of Britannia: The Bombardment of Sweaborg, 9-11 August 1855" in *Seapower Ashore*, edited by Peter Hore, (London: Chatham Publishing, 2001) 120.

³⁹⁹ Beeler, "Steam, Strategy and Shurman", 31.

even in peacetime, the logistical and maintenance challenges associated with steam ships made it much harder to keep that force at sea.⁴⁰⁰

In 1860, a Royal Commission reporting on the defences and national readiness to oppose an invasion of the homeland concluded that, “The introduction of steam may operate to our disadvantage in diminishing to some extent the value of superior seamanship; the efficient blockade of an enemy’s ports has become well-nigh impossible; the practice of firing shells horizontally, and the enormous extent to which the power and accuracy of aim of artillery have been increased, lead to the conclusion that after an action even a victorious fleet would be more seriously crippled and therefore a longer time unfit for service.”⁴⁰¹ The navy, once regarded as the guardians of England’s shores, were now perceived as no longer up to the task. The commission favoured a ‘Fortress England’ option to provide for land defences:

Having carefully weighed the foregoing considerations, we are led to the opinion that neither our fleet, our standing army, nor our volunteer forces, nor even the three combined, can be relied on as sufficient in themselves for the security of the kingdom against foreign invasion. We therefore proceed to consider that part of our instructions which directs our attention especially to fortifications.⁴⁰²

This would include other suggestions for Britain’s security, envisioning a chain of forts, defended bases, depots and dockyards, in a virtual chain for the effective deployment of the navy for war purposes and continued security of the empire.⁴⁰³ These debates of forts versus fleets saw the marines caught up in the wider discussion of naval manning and ultimate purpose and allocation of defence resources.

The next significant change to affect the navy, as well as the marines, were the methods and means of manning the fleet. Service in the Royal Navy versus the merchant fleets was not traditionally deemed desirable due to the harsh conditions of service. In wartime, many sailors were pressed into service for the Royal Navy in which the marines played an active role. The role of Marines then was secure under this system as members of the impressment parties on land, and on ship to keep order and discipline at sea to quell or otherwise prevent would-be mutinies. Immersed in a life at sea, some marines would learn some of the basics of seamanship. This helped create the incorrect perception perpetuated much later in Rudyard Kipling’s 1896 poem about the Royal Marines, “Soldier An’ Sailor Too”, that the multi-talented marine or ‘jolly’ was capable of all tasks as a man

⁴⁰⁰ Beeler, “Steam, Strategy and Shurman”, 31.

⁴⁰¹ Report Of The Commissioners Appointed To Consider The Defences Of The United Kingdom, (London, George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1860), x.

⁴⁰² Report Of The Commissioners Appointed To Consider The Defences Of The United Kingdom, xi.

⁴⁰³ Donald M. Schurman, *Imperial Defence, 1868-1887*, edited by John Beeler, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014) 27.

straddling the skills of both the Army and the Navy.⁴⁰⁴ Though written later, it was applicable to this period as well. Typical of Kipling, the poem is related from the perspective of a soldier with sympathetic rapport by the soldier with the marines:

They come of our lot, they was brothers to us; they was
beggars we'd met an' knew;

Yes, barrin' an inch in the chest an' the arm, they was doubles o' me an' you;⁴⁰⁵

The poem equally stresses how the marine could be relied upon to support the army when required and how the marine, who could apparently manage most any job, did not really fit in with the navy. While there is evidence that the Royal Marines enjoyed this publicity by one of Britain's popular contemporary authors, even reprinting the poem in the Corps newspaper, *The Globe and Laurel*, Julian Thompson has cited how the characterisations penned by Kipling were inaccurate. The marine was never intended as interchangeable with a sailor but always in fact a soldier, however misemployed.⁴⁰⁶ Using marines, however, only partially solved the problem of manning ships, since marines were never seriously accepted as an interchangeable replacement for actual sailors capable of handling all aspects of sailing ships. Common sailors saw severe restrictions placed upon their liberties due to the scarcity of willing volunteers, and to prevent desertion.⁴⁰⁷ Most of all, according to Margerette Lincoln, seamen objected to the practice of cycling crews of warships coming in to the dockyards for refit or repairs over to ships readying for sail.⁴⁰⁸ Whether enlisted voluntarily or pressed, sailors might expect to serve at sea and in port up to a period of five years.⁴⁰⁹ Upon return to port, ships were paid off and their sailors usually set at liberty. The system in place was therefore an unpopular and unreliable method for manning the fleet.

All this would change by the introduction of new terms of service. A 'Continuous Service Act' was introduced in 1853, which was deemed, "highly important to give the Royal Navy a more permanent organization, both as a means of increasing its efficiency and discipline, and of substantially promoting the welfare and comfort of the petty officers and seamen of the Fleet."⁴¹⁰ Sailors now signed on for a period of ten years, and a new rating

⁴⁰⁴ The term 'jolly' was interchangeable for marine, much like 'jack' for the sailor, and was in use by at least 1865, see Hotten, John Camden. *The Slang Dictionary, or the Vulgar Words, Street Phrases and Fast Expressions of High and Low Society*, (London: John Camden Hotten, 1865) 163; Rudyard Kipling, *The Complete Barrack Room Ballads by Rudyard Kipling*, edited by Charles Carrington (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1974) 89-91. Kipling originally published this poem in an 1892 volume called *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses* (1892). Kipling is well known for adopting in his poems, what he believed was the vernacular and colloquialisms of his subjects. For works on Rudyard Kipling in context to the period, see Charles Allen, *Kipling Sahib: India and the Making of Rudyard Kipling* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2008); David Gilmour, *The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling*, (London: Pimlico, 2003); Peter Havholm, *Politics and Awe in Rudyard Kipling's Fiction*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008).

⁴⁰⁵ Kipling, "Soldier and Sailor Too", *The Complete Barrack Room Ballads by Rudyard Kipling* 91.

⁴⁰⁶ Thompson, *Sea Soldiers*, 34.

⁴⁰⁷ Margerette Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy, 1750-1815*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002) 14.

⁴⁰⁸ Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy, 1750-1815*, 14.

⁴⁰⁹ RC 1859, v.

⁴¹⁰ *British Naval Documents, 1204-1960*, edited by John B. Hattendorf, R.J.B., Knight, A.W.H., Pearsall, N.A.M. Rodger, and Geoffrey Till (Aldershot: The Navy Records Society, 1993) 708.

of shipwright, improved rating of seamen-gunners with new promotion rates and pay were now available.⁴¹¹ The belief was that this would provide incentives and a level of stability for sailors, with the idea that those going to sea willingly would get opportunities for better advancement in defined career pathways, so that “greater permanency will be given to a man’s connexion with the naval service”.⁴¹² This had the effect of putting seamen on par with marines who now enlisted for a similar period; no longer were the marines unique in this.

So essential was the manning of the navy that in 1858 a Royal Commission was appointed to examine the effectiveness of these new methods.⁴¹³ The conclusions of the report would influence the manning of the Navy at a time when, following the Crimean War, a need for urgent changes and reforms were recognised to the state of the army and navy. One item the Commission sought to address was, “the curious anomaly by which the mercantile marine was well supplied, while the Navy was always in want of men.”⁴¹⁴ The Commission nevertheless concluded that the new incentives for sailors enlisting on long term contracts were delivering the desired impacts.⁴¹⁵ The prevailing viewpoint in the navy viewed the marines as a naval reserve, useful for manning ships in times of need. The Commission’s conclusions on the manning of the naval reserve included this appraisal of the Marines in a single brief paragraph:

The Marines are a useful and efficient body of men, second to none in the service of the State; they are excellent troops, both as artillerymen and infantry, and are at the same time capable of performing many of the deck duties of a ship of war. There is, however, a limit beyond which they cannot be conveniently increased, for it is necessary to their efficiency that they should spend a large portion of their time afloat. There is ordinarily a reserve of 6,000 marines in the home ports, ready for active service afloat. We think that this force might, with great advantage to the State, and without impairing its efficiency, be increased by 5,000 men, who would be well fitted to garrison the seaports in time of peace; and when required to serve at sea, they could be at once embarked, and their place in the seaports supplied by the regular army or the militia.⁴¹⁶

The Royal Navy, it was recognised, was at first slow to face the realities of increasing mechanization of ships and fleets. In his cross examination, Rear Admiral Alexander Milne, who was soon to be Fourth Sea Lord, served to illustrate to what extent how ingrained antiquated ways of thinking still permeated the navy in moving from masts and

⁴¹¹ *British Naval Documents, 1204-1960*, 708-711.

⁴¹² *British Naval Documents, 1204-1960*, 712.

⁴¹³ HC Deb 18 May 1858 vol 150 cc886-911.

⁴¹⁴ HC Deb 18 May 1858 vol 150 cc896.

⁴¹⁵ RC 1859, vi.

⁴¹⁶ RC 1859, xi.

sails towards steam. Commission panel member William Schaw Lindsay queried whether marines might be trained to fight ship's guns as well as the sailors, and asked Milne what objections he might have against substituting marines for sailors. Milne answered: "Because you would not have a sufficient number of seamen for evolutions aloft."⁴¹⁷

Lindsay would be the sole dissenting panel member, frustrated by the findings and conclusions, refusing to endorse the findings of the report. Lindsay, drew his objections from a long career in the merchant marine fleet and as a ship broker.⁴¹⁸ Later elected Member of Parliament for Tynemouth and Shields in 1854, Lindsay fought for maritime interests and promoted the development of steam power in ships.⁴¹⁹ As a chief representative of the mercantile marine on the Commission, Lindsay was at odds especially with those members anchored in their viewpoints of the Royal Navy. Lindsay decried what he believed were relevant overlooked facts vital to Britain, particularly regarding the role and importance that steam technology was having in maritime affairs:

The introduction of steam navigation, and the almost universal application of the screw propeller to vessels of war, will produce an entire change in the mode of carrying on naval hostilities. The fastest ships having the heaviest guns of the longest range, and fully manned by the most efficient gunners, will, in all probability, prevail in an action. The effects of steam and improved gunnery tend to place all maritime nations more upon an equality as regards the power of dealing destruction. The nation which can most promptly and effectually organize and use these appliances against an enemy will necessarily be placed in the highest state of security, and hold predominant power; and the services of skilled seamen will therefore be less in demand than they were under the ancient system of naval warfare.⁴²⁰

Lindsay notably enclosed his own remarks on the marines, stating, "I consider that 15,000 or 18,000 of the 35,000 additional reserved force to be raised, ought to consist of marines."⁴²¹ Lindsay stated further that, "the whole of our seaport towns should be garrisoned by marines".⁴²² Lindsay specifically cited the evidence given by former First Lord of the Admiralty Sir James Graham as to the utility of marines, as men who were "all light infantry men; every man is a gunner, and every male is trained to the more common naval operations", as well as in guarding the principal seaports and dockyards at Plymouth, Portsmouth, Chatham, and Woolwich.⁴²³ To this effect, Lindsay stated, "Every

⁴¹⁷ RC 1859, 16.

⁴¹⁸ Michael Clark, "William Schaw Lindsay: righting the wrongs of a radical shipowner", *The Northern Mariner*, XX, no. 3, (July 2010), 284-285.

⁴¹⁹ Clark, "William Schaw Lindsay", 294.

⁴²⁰ RC 1859, xxvi.

⁴²¹ RC 1859, xxvi.

⁴²² RC 1859, xxvii.

⁴²³ RC 1859, xxvi, 53.

experienced witness who gave evidence before the Commission bore testimony to the value and efficiency of this meritorious body of men, and all concurred in recommending that the number should be materially increased.”⁴²⁴ While Lindsay, and the former First Lord were certainly advocates for an expansion and better employment of the marines, the statements of other witnesses were divided. Furthermore, despite seventy-nine witnesses being called from all ranks of the navy, no marine officers were called to give evidence.⁴²⁵

Only earlier that year, another Royal Marines Artillery half-pay Captain, John C.R. Colomb, had written similar ideas in a paper of his own to the Royal United Services Institute. Colomb was also a naval strategist in his own right, as was his elder brother, Vice Admiral Philip Howard Colomb.⁴²⁶ Philip Colomb focused his ideas and views very much on the concept of ‘control of the sea’ or as he termed it, ‘command of the sea’.⁴²⁷ Philip Colomb was firmly in the navalist camp, advocating in his published volumes the necessity of maintaining a large fleet and what flexibility this might give for territorial attacks, but always maintaining the primacy of securing sea lanes as the overarching task.⁴²⁸ John Colomb was also developing his own thesis on the connections as he saw it between empire, trade, coal and defence, and was himself a critic of the ‘Fortress England’ concept.⁴²⁹ Economic requirements enabled by seaborne trade could be fused with strategic concepts, and Colomb saw this as a task for Britain’s navy. Like Lindsay, Colomb understood the significance that the new technologies brought, likewise realising that modern trade movement and modern trade security, depended on supplies of coal essential to the movement of both merchant and war ships.⁴³⁰ Colomb would later sit as an elected Member of Parliament, but as a marine, Colomb had a particular bias and was preoccupied with what he believed was the ambiguous status the marines found themselves in under the Admiralty. Colomb reflected on the more recent efforts by Parliament in the 1859 Royal Commission on manning to fail to adequately address an improved role for the marines, which in his opinion set the tone for the next quarter century: “The first sentence tells nothing definite as to the use and application, the second is mysterious, the third is incorrect, the fourth and last has been ignored, and therefore the

⁴²⁴ RC 1859, xxvi.

⁴²⁵ RC 1859, 274-277. The only marine witness was a [Serjeant] Thomas Hobbins, RM, a paymaster from the Portsmouth Division was cross-examined to answer questions on pay, maintenance of equipment and the lodging and care of marine families. Hobbins’ rank as noted in the report utilises a now obsolete of the rank Sergeant.

⁴²⁶ Rear Admiral Philip Colomb published many of his ideas on naval strategy in lectures and papers at the Royal United Services Institute, also in his book, *Naval Warfare: Its Ruling Principles and Practice Historically Treated*, (London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1891).

⁴²⁷ Philip Colomb, *Naval Warfare: Its Ruling Principles and Practice Historically Treated*, (London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1891), 6.

⁴²⁸ Ian Speller, *The Role of Amphibious Warfare in British Defense Policy*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001) 5.

⁴²⁹ Schurman, *Imperial Defence*, 27.

⁴³⁰ Schurman, 27.

whole paragraph is valueless for practical purposes now. Thus were the marine forces officially launched blindfolded into the future of that reconstructed Navy.”⁴³¹

From the minutes of these testimonies, the findings show a distinct split between naval officers who were either champions or detractors of the marines, specifically of the Royal Marines Artillery. Admiral Sir George Seymour, Commander in Chief in Portsmouth, cited the utility of the marines as a reserve force and for the speedy manning of a ship for war, stating, “The marine artillery are the finest body of men in the service, or that I know of in any service, being the picked men of the corps of marines.”⁴³² Seymour heaped further praise on the marines, stating, “I think that the marines are a most valuable body of men. I know of no armed force whose history can be quoted for so many years without failure on service of any sort.” Seymour nevertheless concluded that, “I should prefer seafaring men to be kept, to a dependence even upon the marines.”⁴³³ Similarly, Captain George Randolph also gave his opinion of seamen being the superior gunners in the fleet: “they are more active, and they are better dressed for it.”⁴³⁴ Randolph nevertheless credited the marines as a whole stating, “It is impossible to exalt them too much, they are a most valuable body,” but concluded that he would prefer seeing the number of seamen increased in favour of marines.⁴³⁵ Second Naval Lord, Vice-Admiral Sir Richard Dundas⁴³⁶ was less complimentary, stating, “The marine artillery are useful for their own particular duties; they have training in the laboratory, they have training in the use of mortars, and special training of that sort which is perhaps not necessary for all the seamen, but the seamen are generally speaking the best gunners on board a ship”⁴³⁷ Dundas, however, recommended that marines might be increased in number as a useful reserve, but should remain on ships, suggesting their utility at sea would deteriorate with prolonged absence.⁴³⁸

Rear Admiral Sir Thomas Maitland, speaking from his experience as Commander of HMS *Excellent* and the naval gunnery school,⁴³⁹ suggested that the Marines were wasted by the Navy, particularly their gunnery skills: “I consider the marine artillerymen the most valuable men in Her Majesty’s service, and also the marines; but still the marine artilleryman, I think, is totally thrown away on board ship; for if we can get a seaman capable of being captain of a gun, we put him to it, because we do not like to have the guns in the navy taken out of our hands; and the consequence is, that a marine artilleryman, except when sent ashore with a field-piece, very seldom does his legitimate

⁴³¹ Captain, J.C.R. Colomb, RMA, “The Use and Application of Marine Forces: Past, Present, and Future” *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, 27, 119 (2 February 1883) 100.

⁴³² RC 1859, 75.

⁴³³ RC 1859, 75.

⁴³⁴ RC 1859, 140.

⁴³⁵ RC 1859, 141.

⁴³⁶ RC 1859, 106.

⁴³⁷ RC 1859, 109.

⁴³⁸ RC 1859, 109.

⁴³⁹ RC 1859, 287.

duty.”⁴⁴⁰ Rear Admiral Lord Clarence Paget likewise echoed Maitland’s stance, suggesting an increase to the Marines, and that the Royal Marine Artillery might garrison the principal dockyards.⁴⁴¹ “The marine artillery are in fact the *elite* of the marines”, Paget stated, “they are much more expert in gun exercise, they are perfectly fit to be first captains of the guns, and they are men of a higher class, and they receive rather more pay.”⁴⁴² When asked about the role of marines on ship, Paget reflected, “Strictly speaking the marines are never called upon either to go above the hammock netting or do the duty in a boat.”⁴⁴³ The marine was not interchangeable with the sailor and was not required to perform or learn additional duties. This reality stoked the perception that marines, and especially their officers, were not especially at sea.

The marines could not escape a commonly held view by some in the Admiralty as to their utility as a naval reserve force and solution to naval manning problems. In an 1875 lecture to the Royal United Services Institute, Captain J.C. Wilson, RN, the Navy’s attention now demanded the best employment and welfare for its sailors: “Our seamen, therefore, are no longer birds of passage, migrating from the Royal Navy to the Merchant Navy, sometimes serving under the English, at others under the American Flag, but a carefully picked and expensively reared body of men, a standing force, which must be kept up to a certain numerical standard, regulated, not by the immediate requirements of the Navy, but by policy of the country.”⁴⁴⁴ Wilson stated his belief that sailors ought to take the priority for berthing on ships in time of peace, marines remaining in barracks to garrison the principal naval ports as they had done, with detachments under marine officers prepared for embarkation on short notice.⁴⁴⁵ Wilson, like many others, saw the marines as the “expanding medium of our Navy”, useful as a naval reserve to man ships in time of national crisis, valued for their “solidity and discipline to the crews.”⁴⁴⁶ He continued, “In peace time, the marines should garrison our principal naval ports, under the command of their own general officers; such appears to be their birth right, and would probably be so regarded in any other country but England.”⁴⁴⁷ In the discussion that followed Captain Wilson’s lecture, debate continued with some agreement on the continued value as a useful reserve of manpower to man the fleet. Some, like Admiral Willes, took the opportunity to comment on what was seen as redundancy within the marines: “I do think the time has come when we should no longer have marines and marine artillery. I do not

⁴⁴⁰ RC 1859, 288.

⁴⁴¹ RC 1859, 43.

⁴⁴² RC 1859, 43.

⁴⁴³ RC 1859, 44.

⁴⁴⁴ Captain J. C. Wilson, RN, “Seamen Of The Fleet, Their Training, And How The Employment Of Marines Afloat In Peace Time Affects Them”, *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution*, (London: W. Mitchell and Son), 19, (1875) 604.

⁴⁴⁵ Wilson, “Seamen of the Fleet”, 610.

⁴⁴⁶ Wilson, 610.

⁴⁴⁷ Wilson, 610.

see that you want the two corps.”⁴⁴⁸ The question of an amalgamation was by this point being seriously considered by some.

The greatest point of concern and discussion stemming from Wilson’s lecture was the suggestion that marines might be removed from service at sea and time spent on ship gaining his “sea legs”. “What is it that constitutes a marine? What converts a soldier into a marine?”, were the questions raised in the ensuing discourse.⁴⁴⁹ They struck at the heart of the question of identity, what it was to be a marine. One officer, Commander W. Dawson, proposed that:

But what is it that distinguishes the two portions of the Queen’s sea-service and makes Naval Officers so long for the presence of the marine? It is that the marine has acquired some quality in the course of training which the blue-jacket does not possess. That invaluable quality which we all desiderate, he gets in the intervals of service afloat. In the interval of service afloat, whilst he is in reserve, the marine receives a course of disciplinary training which revives what he has unlearnt at sea.⁴⁵⁰

This idea was well established, in that the marines, unlike sailors, had a barracks to go back to and a Division where they could return to ground themselves again in marine ways. Captain Wilson reckoned that, “keeping as we do a very limited number of ships in commission, and seeing how little sea work we are at present able to give our seamen, it becomes a matter of the first importance to consider whether, in *peace time*, marines should be embarked in *sea going vessels*.”⁴⁵¹ While these arguments were made very much in the context of solving problems of naval manning and keeping men at sea, these statements affirmed an essential component of the marine identity, that service at sea made him distinguishable from a soldier in an army regiment.

Following the findings of the naval manning commission, the government became increasingly preoccupied with the findings of the earlier Royal Commission on the Defence of the United Kingdom, alarmed over the rapid introduction of steam ships in the French navy, and the belief that Britain was vulnerable to invasion by a foreign power. Ultimately, this proved a convenient method of promoting the building of cruisers and forts to protect the dockyards. The evaluations of any usefulness and possible uses of marines by the Navy were of mixed opinions. While the evidence cast the Marines as a “useful body”, there was little real discussion of their best employment beyond use as a reserve force, or in certain cases for gunnery, or manning of port garrisons. Nor at this stage was there any discussion of expanding on their employment service as a naval expeditionary

⁴⁴⁸ Wilson, “Seamen of the Fleet”, 615.

⁴⁴⁹ Wilson, 622.

⁴⁵⁰ Wilson, 622.

⁴⁵¹ Wilson, 609. Italics are as they appear in the journal article.

force, which was already occurring in ad hoc fashion. If the marine then was not to learn and hold additional duties at sea in running the ships the fleet, a more alarming development threatened what remained of the marine role and identity as a soldier at sea would be undercut by sailors employed as ad hoc soldiers.

The Naval Brigades

Since the Crimean War, a Naval Brigade was a term used to define any detachment of seamen, and Royal Marines, drawn from their ships and stations for employment on land usually under the orders of an Army Commander.⁴⁵² Often, large temporary detachments of seamen would be formed from crews of ships along with the marine detachments of either Royal Marines Light Infantry or Royal Marine Artillery embarked aboard. Seamen might also, especially later in the century, be taken from the less technical specialisations, such as stokers, and be placed under arms. These 'brigades' were formations in name only, as their numbers did not match the strengths of actual Army brigades in the field.⁴⁵³ Rarely did these brigades number a battalion strength.⁴⁵⁴ The sailors would wear their naval uniform, their caps with their respective ribbons denoting the ship or port station they served aboard; the Marines were attired as appropriate for their respective service in the artillery or light infantry. As this section of the chapter will show, while offering some level of continuity from the traditional 'cutting out' expeditions for naval landing parties, opportunities for real change for the marines as an organised landing force were not seized upon.

If the sailors of the brigades were good seamen, the same could not be said for their role as improvised infantrymen. Training was often rudimentary, only basic marksmanship having been taught at HMS *Excellent* and some drilling on the Parade Ground at Whale Island.⁴⁵⁵ As Julian Thompson has noted, one of the unfortunate outcomes of the frequent landing of naval brigades in the last half of the nineteenth century, especially against what were perceived by many as second class enemies, was a perception in many naval officer's minds "that soldiering was easy and that little training was required."⁴⁵⁶ Captains of warships were therefore also reluctant to allow their marine detachments to land for training in order to practice those infantry skills which they considered beneath the art and science of seamanship, and therefore requiring in their view little practice was necessary. Ultimately the practice detracted from the readiness and cleanliness of the ship they manned.⁴⁵⁷ This was to have repercussions on the Marines well into the next century.

⁴⁵² Arthur Bleby, *The Victorian Naval Brigades*, (Dunbeath: Whittles Publishing, 2006), 3.

⁴⁵³ Brigades comprised of several battalions from different regiments from line infantry and could number between 3,000-5,000 soldiers. They would be organized around a regimental staff structure with a general officer appointed in command. Each Brigade therefore was an affiliation of different regiments who would give up a battalion.

⁴⁵⁴ With some variations between army regiments, a battalion numbered 800 men in this period.

⁴⁵⁵ Bleby, *The Victorian Naval Brigades*, vii.

⁴⁵⁶ Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 41.

⁴⁵⁷ Thompson, 41-42.

Yet soldiering was also regarded by many Victorian naval officers as a diversion, and for lack of any opportunities for fleet action in the sixty years between the Crimean War and the First World War, the only active service was on shore through naval brigade actions. Fighting ashore was a chance for distinction, as well as gain decorations and a chance at promotion. Ample opportunities were provided in Crimea, China, India, and Africa throughout the century. Sailors, armed with rifles and bayonets, might even bring ashore Gatling guns, 12pdr guns, and 4.7 inch naval guns taken from their ships fitted with ingenious improvised mountings which could outgun most field pieces. Yet the temptation was there for the sailors, naval officers especially, to act in the part of infantrymen. As will be shown, this practice would prove highly dangerous and often fatal to many naval officers, and their unfortunate sailors. The debate on marine employment would continue in the coming years towards the close of the century. Missing was any focus on what, if any, peculiar qualities and talents were unique to the Royal Marines and what role might develop that suited these traits.

'Small Wars' and the naval brigades

The use of naval brigades was highly useful however for the emerging concept for the Royal Navy in the types of conflicts which increasingly characterised the nineteenth century: those of the so-called 'limited wars' or 'small wars'. The period of the so called *Pax Britannica*, marked by naval dominance of the Royal Navy and the flexibility of naval power, was not an era of peace but one punctuated by a multitude of conflicts which take on the names for the regions and indigenous peoples the British fought against. In time, these conflicts were also defined in certain cases as, 'limited wars' or 'small wars'. The term saw increasing popularity and usage by several authors, including the naval strategist and historian Julian Corbett.⁴⁵⁸ Further popularisation of the term in British military circles was also due in large part to the writings of Charles E. Callwell, an army officer who had gained much experience in many of the campaigns and expeditions of the late nineteenth century. Callwell defined small wars of the British empire as follows in his book of the same name:

Small war is a term which has come largely into use largely into use of late years, and which is somewhat difficult to define. Practically it may be said to include all campaigns other than those where opposing sides consist of regular troops. It comprises the expeditions against savages and semi-civilised races by disciplined soldiers, campaigns undertaken to suppress rebellious and guerrilla warfare in all parts of the world where organized armies are struggling against opponents who will

⁴⁵⁸ See Julian Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy: A Theory of War on the High Seas* (Great Britain: Adansonia Publishing, 2018).

not meet them in the open field. It thus obviously covers operations very varying in their scope and in their conditions.⁴⁵⁹

Callwell's essay, "Lessons to be learned from the campaigns in which British Forces have been employed since the year 1865", on the study of British military campaigns won him a prize by the Royal United Services Institute.⁴⁶⁰ Able to range the seas and despatch its own marines and sailors ashore, the Royal Navy had the best option to influence operations in littoral regions.

These sorts of conflicts were ideally suited to the Royal Navy. For example, naval brigade debarkations of marines from HMS *Shannon* and HMS *Pearl* formed into a provisional battalion to assist in the suppression of the Indian Mutiny. The same provisional battalion was utilised in China to seize forts, garrison outposts, and protect British citizens in what was known as the Second China War or Second Opium War.⁴⁶¹ In military campaigns, this model for employment of marines from ships in the fleet in ad hoc battalions or brigades, often only nominally and varied in size and strength, proved a reliable and flexible option for the navy to support the larger army divisions on shore.⁴⁶² This same model was also utilised in the same latter half of the century in Africa, such as the Ashanti War of 1873 and the Anglo-Egypt War of 1882. In both cases, marines were among the first to land ashore and formed part of the naval brigades which assisted in the build-up of troops; they would also take part in many of the key battles of these campaigns. The Mediterranean Fleet under Admiral Seymour bombarded the port of Alexandria into submission and utilised marines to occupy and hold the port. The same occurred at Port Said which was the gateway to the Suez Canal. The army was then able to rapidly land and build up his forces and march on Cairo. The marines were in every engagement along the way, including at Tel El Kebir, Kassassin, and the important seizure of Ismaila which was used to capture Cairo when the advance from Alexandria stalled.⁴⁶³ The methods employed by the naval brigade were described in the memoirs of Admiral Sir Percy Scott who as a young officer led marines and sailors on the Congo River in 1874 on a punitive mission against pirates to recover a trading schooner, the *Geraldine*:

The method of procedure was simple. On nearing a village the boats carrying the guns shelled the place all round as a preliminary to the landing of the marines, who formed a cordon and fired into the bush, while the remainder of the brigade disembarked. An advance was then made, firing the whole time. The villages were

⁴⁵⁹ Major C.E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, (London: Watchmaker Publishing, 1899) 1.

⁴⁶⁰ Captain Charles E. Callwell, R.A., "Lessons to be learned from the campaigns in which British Forces have been employed since the year 1865", *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, (London: W.E. Mitchell and Son), 31, (1887): 357-412.

⁴⁶¹ Moulton, *The Royal Marines*, 35.

⁴⁶² Moulton, 36.

⁴⁶³ Moulton, 39-40; Thompson, *The Royal Marines*, 39.

generally found deserted and a search usually revealed some relic of the *Geraldine*. Such operations ended with the destruction of the village and canoes by fire.⁴⁶⁴

Scott clearly valued his marines in such expeditions, and cited their value and stoic nature in his writings and memoirs, as shown in this anecdote of the same Congo expedition:

Our broadside fire was twenty-five marines on each side, under the most able officer that I have ever met in H.M. Navy, Lieutenant Adolphus Crosbie, R.M.L.I. We were always the leading boat in attacking and the last boat on leaving. The marines were magnificent. At the boom of a volley from the natives in the bush, which might have meant death to them (as they were showing well above the armour-plating), we always ducked. The marines, on the other hand, did not move a muscle, but came to the present at Crosbie's order as if they were doing position drill.⁴⁶⁵

Crosbie was no stranger to such expeditions having gained experience in 1869 at Swatow, China in a punitive operation against Chinese pirates employing similar tactics.⁴⁶⁶ Scott clearly related what he felt was an essential function for the marines working with the navy, and his approval was of value as he would later command the Royal Navy gunnery school at HMS *Excellent* in Portsmouth. Reflecting on his formative experiences in Africa, Scott described the action and method of bombardment he employed as akin to that of an artillery barrage that came to be commonplace in France in 1917.⁴⁶⁷ These experiences had their roots in the Boer War. The navy had supported the rapid deployment of troops to South Africa at the start of the Boer War and by using his experience from the gunnery school, Scott recommended the implementation of naval guns ashore to make a tangible, but also highly visible contribution by the navy to the war:

With regard to the South African War, even before it commenced I realised that it was purely a soldiers' war. The Boers had no navy to fight, no seaports for us to secure, no commerce for us to attack, and the theatre of fighting was too far inland for a naval brigade to go. The small number of infantry that we could land would be inappreciable, and the only field service guns that we had to land were of the same pattern as the Royal Artillery. It, therefore, appeared obvious that it was a war in which the Navy could take but a small part. A lucky chance, however, arose. The Boers had got long-range mobile guns, and our Army had not. This ill-wind blew good to us.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁴ Admiral Sir Percy Scott, *Fifty Years in the Royal Navy*, (London: John Murray, 1919) 18.

⁴⁶⁵ Scott, *Fifty Years in the Royal Navy*, 19.

⁴⁶⁶ "Correspondence respecting attack on boats of Her Majesty's ship *Cockchafer* by villagers near Swatow", HC Command Papers, 1868-1869, 4097-VI, LXIV.193, vol. 64.

⁴⁶⁷ Scott, *Fifty Years in the Royal Navy*, 18.

⁴⁶⁸ Scott, 172.

The success of the naval brigade enabled Scott to assert with confidence, "it was their homecoming, with its public parades, in which they hauled their guns, and dinners in Portsmouth, Windsor, and London, which took a grip in the public's imagination."⁴⁶⁹ The significance of this type of employment was the speed by which the navy could respond to crises in the region, and the expediency of detaching marines for shore duties in a wide range of roles. In this capacity, marines found themselves with the navy or attached to the army. Seldom, if ever, did they operate independently but always under command of naval or army officers. Furthermore, working with the Royal Navy as part of the ad-hoc naval brigades, but as will be shown in this next section, caused their own problems for the marines in what was perceived as appropriation of the tasks to which, based on their training, most suited the marines. For the marines, however, service with the naval brigades only served to highlight the problem of an ill-defined mission and further ingrained the idea of redundancy and increased marginalisation. One particular battle illustrated this point in ways previous ones could not.

The battle at Graspan

Marine General and historian H.E. Blumberg would describe the battle at Graspan as, "one of the brightest episodes in the long history of the Corps."⁴⁷⁰ But the legacy is in fact more complex and reveals a fundamental concern as to the role and function of the marines, and in particular how they would operate in concert within the Royal Navy. The marines were employed according to established practice: as members of a naval brigade under naval officers. The outcome of this battle, however, and the subsequent enquiries would illuminate that while the marines were still valued and respected for their military prowess, in other respects they were still not utilised to the best extent of their abilities by the Admiralty or the War Office.

The battle of Graspan, also known as Enslin⁴⁷¹, featured in the campaign to relieve a disastrous situation where the Boer forces had besieged the town of Kimberley early at the outbreak of the war. Besides the public embarrassment of having a town under siege, the British authorities feared that a Boer capture of the town would considerably increase the financial resources available to the Boer republics through access to Kimberley's diamond mines. A task force of 8,000 men organised into three brigades under Lieutenant General Lord Methuen landed at Cape Town on 10th November 1899 to force a way north from Cape Town to raise the Boer siege of Kimberley. Sailors and marines formed a naval brigade dispatched from HMS *Doris* and HMS *Powerful*, and were attached to Methuen's forces, which included among other regiments, the Grenadier Guards and those of the 9th Brigade. Nominally a brigade, the Naval Brigade under Methuen was essentially a weak

⁴⁶⁹ Hore, *Seapower Ashore*, 15.

⁴⁷⁰ Blumberg, *History of the Royal Marines*, 111.

⁴⁷¹ So called because of the rail station of the same name nearby.

half-battalion comprised around 365 Royal Navy sailors and officers and Royal Marines Light Infantry from the ships company. It was the four 12-pound guns mounted on improvised gun carriages from HMS *Powerful* which the Naval Brigade brought with them that would be used to great effect to counter the Boer artillery in the battles to come and in the relief of the town.⁴⁷²

Early actions on the march up revealed the challenges ahead. The terrain was largely open veldt, open ground dominated at intervals by jagged kopjes.⁴⁷³ Their adversaries in the Boers, were a highly mobile force on their horses and deadly marksmen, who chose their ground based on their knowledge of the terrain, and despite being outnumbered, used tactics they knew would best blunt any British advantage. Methuen's division marched out from Cape Town, following the railway line north towards Kimberley. At a place called Belmont on 22nd November, Methuen found a force of 2,000 Boers waiting for him. Determined he could not bypass them, Methuen decided he had to clear the enemy from his vital line of communication: the railway. Of the Boer position at Belmont, Arthur Conan Doyle would write in his history of the Boer War:

The force of the Boers was much inferior to our own, some two or three thousand in all, but the natural strength of their position made it a difficult one to carry, while it could not be left behind us as a menace to our line of communications. A double row of steep hills lay across the road to Kimberley, and it is was along the ridges, snuggling closely among the boulders, that our enemy was waiting for us. In their weeks of preparation they had constructed elaborate shelter pits in which they could lie in comparative safety while they swept all the level ground with rifle fire.⁴⁷⁴

This description would characterise the sort of terrain the British encountered and the tactics employed by the Boers during Methuen's campaign and many more to come. At Belmont, Methuen devised to use the Guards and the 9th Brigade in a direct frontal assault on the Boer positions at dawn; the Naval Brigade would be held in reserve. Two cavalry squadrons were meant to also move north up the Kimberley road, and essentially around to the rear of the Boer position to cut off any escape. As the British infantry advanced, the Boers opened a heavy fire on them. The two leading Guards battalions went to ground and fired ineffective volleys at the Boer positions, while the rest of the 9th Brigade continued their advance. British artillery batteries came up and went into action, suppressing the Boer positions to enable the Guards to continue their advance and storm the Boer positions. The Boers did not wait for the final bayonet attack but hurried away down the far hillside to where their ponies were tethered and rode back to join their

⁴⁷² The Royal Navy field gun competition, which still survives in some form today, derived from the transportation of the naval guns by the Naval Brigade of *Powerful* and *Doris* for the relief of Ladysmith.

⁴⁷³ Afrikaans word with a Dutch origin, meaning a small hill in a generally flat area. The Dutch word 'kop' signified head, and kopje is a diminutive signifying a 'small head'.

⁴⁷⁴ A. Conan Doyle, *The Great Boer War*, (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1900) 132.

compatriots on the next line of kopjes to their rear. By the time the British infantry reached the top of the hills the Boers were gone. The inadequate numbers of British cavalry precluded any effective pursuit, as the Boers jumped on their ponies and raced away bringing the battle to an end. British casualties were 75 officers and soldiers killed and 223 wounded. Officer casualties were reported as severe, “although care had been taken to remove all distinctive marks from their uniforms.”⁴⁷⁵ Boer casualties were reportedly 81 killed, with more wounded and some captured.⁴⁷⁶

A nearly identical battle unfolded two later at Graspan, only this time it saw the participation of the Naval Brigade attack as infantry a Boer force estimated at 2,500 with six guns.⁴⁷⁷ Again the Boers were positioned overlooking the railway on a long ridge of low hills rising gradually from the veldt, beyond which was a further hill, the top being a precipitous ridge. At dawn on the 25th, the British artillery and two naval guns manned by the sailors and marines began a bombardment of the Boer positions. The infantry advanced in a frontal attack, according to Methuen’s plan, this time with the Guards in reserve and the 9th Brigade leading the assault on the left flank and the much smaller Naval Brigade on the British right flank. Advancing in open order across open ground towards the elevated Boer positions, exposed to accurate fire, casualties were predictably high. Early lessons of the war had taught many of the army officers to remain as unobtrusive as possible. When the Boers opened fire, Captain Prothero RN of HMS *Doris* remained standing while his men went to ground; he was soon shot and severely wounded. Commander Ethelston of HMS *Powerful* was similarly hit, but fatally. For the Marines, their senior officer, Major Plumbe, was shot and killed in the closing attack up the kopje, as was another Marine Officer, Captain Senior.⁴⁷⁸ Total British losses were twenty officers and men killed and 165 wounded. The Naval Brigade suffered 101 casualties from their 365 men in the field, nearly a third of their force, including nearly all their officers killed or wounded. Boer losses were estimated at over 200 dead and wounded.⁴⁷⁹

The resulting victory at Graspan, as well as the astonishing casualty rate, also prompted an immediate message from the Queen: “The Queen desires you will convey to the Naval Brigade who were present at the action at Graspan her Majesty’s congratulations on their gallant conduct, at the same time express the Queen’s regret at the losses sustained by the Brigade.”⁴⁸⁰ Press accounts, which covered the movements and happenings of the war closely and to the best detail possible, reported the actions of the Naval Brigade generally in a positive light citing their valour. *The Hampshire Advertiser* reported:

⁴⁷⁵ “The Military Situation”, *The Times* (London, England), Monday, November 27 1899; pg. 12.

⁴⁷⁶ “The War: Battle Near Graspan”, *The Times* (London, England), Monday, 27 November 1899; pg. 7.

⁴⁷⁷ “The Military Situation”, *The Times*, 12.

⁴⁷⁸ “The Naval Brigade Losses”, *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* (Bristol, England), Monday, 27 November 1899, pg. 3.

⁴⁷⁹ “The Naval Brigade Losses”, *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 3.

⁴⁸⁰ “Queen’s Message to the Naval Brigade”, *The Times* (London, England), Tuesday, 28 November 1899; pg. 10.

It is difficult to single out any one detachment of our men for especial gallantry where all have done so well, but assuredly the Naval Brigade comes in the very first rank. All reports testify to the splendid service they have rendered, which has more than once turned the tide of fortune. The graphic accounts of the fighting at [Enslin], which now reach us, show that their courage was put to the severest test.⁴⁸¹

The Times however sceptically noted that “we may well doubt whether it is desirable that the personnel of the Navy should be drained away in military operations hundreds of miles from the sea”.⁴⁸² Arthur Conan Doyle later noted the high costs of the actions at both Belmont and Graspan:

The battle of [Enslin] had cost us some two hundred of killed and wounded, and beyond the mere fact that we had cleared our way by another stage towards Kimberley it is difficult to say what advantage we had from it. We won the kopjes, but we lost our men. The Boer killed and wounded were probably less than half of our own, and the exhaustion and the weakness of our cavalry forbade us to pursue and prevented us from capturing their guns. In three days the men had fought two exhausting actions in a waterless country.⁴⁸³

Methuen had won two minor victories against the Boers, but losing ten percent of his original force before even reaching his ultimate objective at Kimberley sickened him.⁴⁸⁴ For the Naval Brigade, the staggering losses confined them to duties around employment of their guns; they would not participate in further assaults.⁴⁸⁵ Replacements of sailors and marines would not arrive until December. For the Marines, the fallout over this particular episode would become a flashpoint for debate over the employment of naval brigades, and to an extent the role they served in them.

Sailors as soldiers

In Parliament, as news of these events broke, questions arose which could not be obfuscated in the reports of heroic deeds, or in mourning of those lost in the field. Small victories were being achieved at great prices with limited immediate results, and the methods and tactics welcomed a pause for thought. Reports as to what had taken place at Graspan were scarce, only the papers had the details as the official despatches had not been released to the House floor. This delay offered an opportunity for some to comment, such as the MP for Lancashire, Sir James Duckworth, on what they saw as the mishandling of the affair and misuse of the Marines as a prized asset:

⁴⁸¹ “The Progress of the War”, *The Hampshire Advertiser* (Southampton, England), Saturday, 2 December 1899; pg. 6.

⁴⁸² “The Military Situation”, *The Times* (London, England), Monday, 27 November, 1899; pg. 12.

⁴⁸³ Doyle, *Boer War*, 137.

⁴⁸⁴ Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War*, (London: Abacus, 1979) 188.

⁴⁸⁵ Blumberg, *History of the Royal Marines*, 111.

I do not think the marines have had the encouragement to which they are entitled, or that the public really understand what they have to do and are capable of doing. They are men prepared to fight on land or sea. In South Africa they seem to be absorbed in the Naval Brigade, and the reports state that the Naval Brigade have done this, that, and the other thing, while little is said or known about the marines. This is a long-standing complaint: in fact, I used to hear of it as a youth.⁴⁸⁶ I have a letter from a young fellow at the front in South Africa, who has taken part in four engagements with the marines. He writes after the battle of Graspan that— “The marines here have been disappointed at the reports of the battle in some of the papers. There was nothing but that the bluejackets had been doing this, that, and the other thing, and that the bluejackets had charged up the hill. There was not even a mention that the marines were there. As a matter of fact, there were only fifty bluejackets compared with 220 marines in the firing line.”⁴⁸⁷

Absence of any mention of the marines in the papers was an exaggeration, but the perception of the marines' exploits being subsumed within those of the other services was already a time-honoured grievance. Official despatches related to the performance of the Naval Brigade with Methuen, relayed by Admiral Harris the Commander-in-Chief of the Cape of Good Hope Station who had dispatched the naval brigade, were not immediately made available in Parliament for further scrutiny beyond the First Lord of the Admiralty, George Goschen. Several attempts to bring the matters to the floor faced obstruction.⁴⁸⁸ Matters for debate in Parliament was the “the proceedings of naval brigades when acting ashore under the orders and as part of the force of a military general.”⁴⁸⁹ John Colomb attacked the Admiralty for sending combat replacements of sailors, instead of marines, into the field:

I particularly raise this question in order to obtain a clear and explicit statement of the policy of the Admiralty with regard to these landing parties from ships. There is nothing in the regulations as to what are to be the arrangements of the Admiral if he has to land a force. The Admiral uses his discretion. This marine force has been trained for a special purpose, and my contention is that when war breaks out that force should be applied to that special purpose. I am fully and firmly convinced that the gallant Admiral at the Cape⁴⁹⁰ was perfectly right in rendering every assistance he could to the Army. But my point is, was that assistance given in such a manner as to least and not most impair the efficiency of Her Majesty's ships? Clearly, the

⁴⁸⁶ Duckworth had himself, at seventeen, served briefly in the Royal Marines before injury had invalidated him out of the service.

⁴⁸⁷ HC Deb, 27 February 1900, vol. 79, cc.1275.

⁴⁸⁸ HC Debate 19 February 1900, vol 79, cc.361-362; HC Deb 26 March 1900 vol 81 cc309-10.

⁴⁸⁹ HC Deb 26 March 1900 vol 81 cc310.

⁴⁹⁰ This was Admiral Sir Robert Harris, who commanded the Naval station at Cape Town during much of the South African War - “Royal Commission on the War in South Africa”, Vol I, (London: Spottiswoode, 1908), iv. Hereafter RC 1908.

forces that can best be spared from the ships are the marine officers and men; and equally clearly, the forces which can least be spared are the naval officers and seamen. I ask the First Lord specifically why there are no regulations laid down on this point; if there are such regulations, did the Admiral follow them? Is it not the case that officers and men of the marine force have been kept on board while naval officers and seamen have been landed?⁴⁹¹

When Captain Prothero was severely wounded, Commander Ethelston killed and the other marine officers killed or wounded, marine Captain Alfred Marchant suddenly found himself in command of the Naval Brigade. His command was short lived, as three days later, "he was superseded in the command of the brigade by another naval officer knowing nothing about land warfare or tactics,"⁴⁹² as Colomb reminded Parliament. Colomb sought to underscore the fallacy of what he saw as unqualified naval officers leading sailors as infantrymen:

There was a naval officer⁴⁹³ in command of the whole, so-called, naval brigade, a gallant gentleman, as bold as a lion and as fearless as they make them, but wholly and entirely ignorant of land warfare. Under him was a major of marine infantry, who had passed his examination at Aldershot or elsewhere for his lieutenant-colonelcy, and knowing how to command three arms of the service.⁴⁹⁴ The young marine artillery officer and his gunners, with all their artillery training, were used, in accordance with Admiralty custom, as infantry, and the officer and most of his gunners were shot storming the position as infantry.⁴⁹⁵

Colomb denounced the handling of the battle at Graspan and decried the staggering losses of men, with the navy having lost senior officers as well as the Royal Marines, and in particular, the poor leadership of the naval officers "ignorant of land warfare"⁴⁹⁶:

[You] have this naval officer with no military, and very scanty naval, training, landed on shore, to the great detriment of his ship, and sent to the front as the superior of officers trained for military work, while the officers trained for military work are really left out of the chance of command altogether. This is a matter concerning the lives of men and the efficiency of ships and of the whole service, and I extremely regret that, knowing what I do, I am forced into the unpleasant position of having continually to bring the misapplication of this force forward until there are proper

⁴⁹¹ HC Deb 01 March 1900 vol 79 cc1463-1464.

⁴⁹² HC Deb 01 March 1900 vol 79 cc1466-1467.

⁴⁹³ Colomb here refers to Captain Prothero, in command and wounded at Graspan.

⁴⁹⁴ These were the infantry, the artillery and the cavalry.

⁴⁹⁵ HC Deb 01 March 1900 vol 79 cc1465-1466.

⁴⁹⁶ HC Deb 01 March 1900 vol 79 cc1466.

regulations made in the interest of the public service, and not in favour of any particular class of officers.⁴⁹⁷

Graspan is also useful to reveal the real tensions that were commonplace between the army and the navy. Traditionally, despatches post-battle were published in the *London Gazette* by the Commanding Officer in the field. The events in Africa were complicated by the fact that Methuen and the naval brigade had different higher reporting chains in the War Office and Admiralty respectively. Methuen's despatches on the events at Belmont and Graspan were published shortly afterwards in January, but the naval despatches submitted by the Cape Town station for the same events were not published until late March, and initially suppressed while the War Office and the Admiralty worked to avoid the publication of differing versions of the same event.⁴⁹⁸ Goschen would claim "the 'naval despatches' papers had been mislaid somewhere."⁴⁹⁹ In fact, from the time the events were being reported by Methuen through his chain of command, and the naval brigade through Admiralty, the Admiralty's report was immediately withheld with objections from the War Office. The propriety of publishing potentially differing reports was immediately highlighted, as was the appropriated relationship between naval forces operating with or as part of army forces. The compromise arrived at was for, "In cases where a Naval Brigade is part of a military force, the Naval officer in command will report in duplicate to the General Officer Commanding & to the Naval Commander-in-Chief." This allowed for reviewer in the War Office the opportunity for "suggesting any alterations or omissions which may occur to him", and "if necessary, revise the report to whatever extent may seem necessary and forward it to the Admiralty by whom it will be published after consultation with the War Office should there be any difference of opinion as to the publication of any part of it."⁵⁰⁰ Much later, a Royal Commission would examine the conduct of the war in greater detail. As the participation of the marines was overwhelmingly slight in the war, a commentary on the suitability and readiness of marines "to take part small expeditions in different parts of the world near the sea coast", by Admiral Sir Robert Harris, the man who had dispatched the naval brigade with great speed to Cape Town to assist Lord Methuen in the relief of Kimberley, citing "they could easily be landed from the ships" as "they are always available."⁵⁰¹

Finally, Graspan highlights again how the common Corps grievance of inadequate recognition of their deeds continued at the start of the new century. Graspan was denied as a medal clasp to the South Africa Medal, the campaign medal minted to record the

⁴⁹⁷ HC Deb 01 March 1900 vol 79 cc1467.

⁴⁹⁸ Lord Methuen's despatches were published in the *London Gazette*, Friday 26 January 1900, no. 27157; the Naval despatches were delayed in publication and did not appear until 30th March 1900, in the *London Gazette*, Friday, March 30, 1900, no. 27178.

⁴⁹⁹ WO 32/7945, Goschen to Lansdowne, 5 June 1900.

⁵⁰⁰ WO 32/7945, "Boer War: Question of publication of dispatches of officers commanding Naval Brigades at battles of Colenso and Graspan: memorandum by Major General Sir Coleridge Grove; reports of actions."

⁵⁰¹ RC 1908, 386.

military deeds of the war. Initial enthusiasm, as early as 1899, around the creation of a South Africa Medal and its corresponding clasps was reigned in by Lord Roberts who sought a stricter qualification process for the inclusion of battle clasps for British victories. As the war progressed, each battle event was reviewed and evaluated on its own merits for its impact and contribution. Despite Graspan being considered a victory in Methuen's campaign, and its similarities in many respects to the battle of Belmont, Belmont was given a clasp while Graspan would not.⁵⁰² In Parliament, the Secretary of State for War reported to the enquiring Member of Parliament for Portsmouth that:

I am afraid that it will not be possible to issue a clasp for Graspan. It has been decided to limit the grant of clasps to the chief actions of the war. If a clasp were granted for Graspan, it would be necessary to issue others for several actions of similar importance.⁵⁰³

The margins of the South African Medal decision book at the National Archives, records on 2 January 1902, "Clasp for Graspan: - Admiralty proposal negative by the King", signifying by the time of this issue being presented again in Parliament the clasp had already been denied in keeping with Lord Robert's original decision.⁵⁰⁴ Thus, the Marines lost the distinction of a clasp for the South Africa Medal for the principal action of the war they might claim for themselves. Reflecting on the role of the Corps in Africa, the Corps historian Cyril Field stated:

...although the Corps was so poorly represented in point of numbers in what turned out to be the biggest war in which we had engaged for many decades, yet its few representatives upheld its reputation to the very utmost, especially at Graspan, and no record of the services of the Corps would be complete which did not give some account of their work in this momentous campaign.⁵⁰⁵

Despite this, the legacy was more complicated. On the one hand, the Corps could be rightfully proud of how they had carried the day and conducted themselves. At the same time, their deeds were overshadowed by their role working with and as part of the navy, whose own leadership and conduct caused severe doubt as to what they were doing there charging with rifles, and not manning their guns as had been their purpose. In the port towns inhabited by the Marines, the citizenry were happy at least to put on display the monuments which honoured the Corps' achievements which in part reflected the links of their community to celebrated martial deeds. The event was commemorated with the Graspan Memorial in London along with the events in China at the Peking Legation the

⁵⁰² WO 162/96, "South Africa Medal", Army Order No. 94, of 1901.

⁵⁰³ HC Debate, 28 January 1902, vol. 101 cc1092-3.

⁵⁰⁴ WO 162/96, South Africa Medal Decision Book.

⁵⁰⁵ Field, *Sea Soldiers*, Vol.2, 234.

following year, although the significance of Graspán as an important battle for the Corps was further obscured in short time by those of the First World War.

Conclusion

For the Marines, the new century began with no real changes to their existing purpose and no emerging prospects for better use or employment. According to some observers, despite the transition to steam, naval culture had changed little. On first going to sea in 1903, then Marine Lieutenant Frederick Jerram observed, “my introduction to the sea, although to a nearly new cruiser⁵⁰⁶ was far more Nelsonic than modern.”⁵⁰⁷ To Jerram, sailors at the threshold of the modern era could still evoke the bygone image of ‘jack tar’:

An A.B. still was an A.B. More often than not bearded and they looked and were real sailormen. A few mornings after I joined I watched the [Bos’un’s] party put a long splice in a 6 ½ inch wire. Sail or pulling was the way you got ashore, and in the Channel Fleet only one steamboat was allowed.⁵⁰⁸

Jerram further summarised his impressions of the state of the navy at the turn of the new century as follows:

The Navy in general was a survivor of sail. Every officer and man was sail trained. No seaman ever dreamed of wearing boots on board, and [seaboats], leather, were the [perquisite] of officers and warrant officers. Most small Cruisers carried at least fore and aft sail; there were half dozen men o’ war Brigs at Plymouth and more at Portland and it was a fine sight to see them, make sail and put to sea. Yards were still fitted with jackstays for sails, and even the lower booms gave notice of their origin in the eye for the lower [stun’s’l] tack block. There was no electric lights in harbours, the mess decks and flats being lit by brass candle lamps, and the food was pure old Navy. The men were on salt pork, beef and biscuit immediately on going to sea, and the wardroom after three days. No jam or fancy food and [tabacco] purely leaf. It is not an idle yarn that many of the older A.B.’s⁵⁰⁹ fell in and complained when jam was later issued. They thought the Navy was going soft.⁵¹⁰

The navy of course had changed. Steam was the prevailing mode of propulsion and naval gunnery had improved in both lethality and range, preventing the likelihood of close fleet actions once the norm. Regardless of any actual or perceived lack of soldiering skills, sailors and naval officers justified to themselves their utility on land as well in the naval

⁵⁰⁶ This was HMS *Hogue*, laid down in 1898 and launched in 1904.

⁵⁰⁷ Jerram, *Reminences*, 6.

⁵⁰⁸ Jerram, 6.

⁵⁰⁹ Abbreviated form of Able Seaman, an enlisted rating in the Royal Navy and merchant navy which denoted qualifications and experience for service at sea.

⁵¹⁰ All original spellings are noted in brackets as in the manuscript. Jerram, *Reminences*, 6.

brigades. The domain of the marines on ship increasingly eroded and marginalised, all these proved threatening to the future of the Royal Marines.

While the commissions may have claimed the Marines as useful, there was an increased recognition that better uses for them might be found. While some were prepared to advocate their complete dissolution, those who advocated their retention could offer few compelling or innovative solutions. The Royal Commissions on naval manning and defence, discussions and debates as to the role of marines within the navy did little to advance or improve the status of the marines. By the end of the nineteenth century, despite the continued service of the marines in many of the far-flung corners of the globe and empire, most of their functions at sea had ceased to exist.

A lack of understanding of the Marines by some, or indeed imagination on what they might do based on the previous accomplishments and needs of the nation under arms was also evident. While the Admiralty might have been the more culpable in this, the marines themselves at this point were unable to adequately influence or articulate viable changes for their own better employment. Reorganisation was perhaps one answer, but by the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth century, the Marines were still organised in their dockyard Divisions with detachments assigned to serve at sea. Despite a presumed heritage of operating in the seaborne environment, the Royal Marines were not the experts on amphibious operations and could not deliver that capability. The Marines lacked the command structure and organization of their forces to suit the task, as well as special equipment, the training, or doctrine to consult.⁵¹¹ Save for past experiences of mobilising ad hoc battalions in times of need, no standing force within the Corps' structure was prepared to assume such an expeditionary role. The experience of naval brigades, as shown here, served to only heighten these tensions as the marines who saw themselves as the trained professional soldiers deferring to naval officers in an amateur capacity on land. The debates as to the future of the marines in the last quarter of the nineteenth century failed to conclusively advance a role for the Royal Marines. The fact that debates about their role and future were taking place should have been a cause for considerable alarm to them. While Marines could reflect on the long and faithful service of their Corps, no clear consensus could be reached on what marines ought to do or what they might do. As shown, even on the battlefield as at Graspan, the army and the navy continued to debate and lobby for funding for their respective services and prized status of the most useful service to the nation; the marines never occupied such a role or status.

What solutions then were being proposed and were any viable ones proposed from the ranks of the marines themselves? If so, why did these not come to fruition? One reason shown here was the absence of any influential voice in government or the Admiralty that

⁵¹¹ Bittner, "Britannia's Sheathed Sword", 347.

could best articulate a better usage in the national interest. While royal patrons helped avoid complete disbandment, other would be champions like Lindsay or Colomb lacked the necessary influence to force real changes. In the next chapter some of these other proposals, of which some were propagated by Marines, will be examined in detail.

Chapter 5. "Shall we Retain the Marines?"

Amidst the vast changes in war and warfare that have taken place during the last quarter of a century, the question has often arisen whether the Royal Marines shall be retained as a part of the armed forces of England. Are they an antiquated and useless force? Must they disappear with Brown Bess, smooth-bores, and three-deckers? This threat of disestablishment, ever impending, can have but a bad effect, not only on the Royal Marines themselves, but also on the Royal Navy, of which they are at present an important branch. It is surely time now that some decision should be arrived at: first, whether they should continue to exist; next if they are to exist, whether their services are now employed to the best advantage. – General Sir G.A. Schomberg, Royal Marines Artillery, 1883⁵¹²

In the twenty-five years from 1889 and the outbreak of the First World War, naval history developed as both a serious scholarly and popular study offering opportunity for modern scientific study to offer critical insights.⁵¹³ Those uncovering the principles for naval warfare included Alfred Thayer Mahan, and the Colomb brothers.⁵¹⁴ These and others pondered the options for Britain's use of sea power, citing its renewed interest. The overstretched capacity of the British army to quell mutinies and disturbances in colonial territories or defend British trade or political interests saw the increased use of the navy's flexible option: the naval brigades. Opinions were soon divided as to how warfare was evolving, which included navalists focused on fleets and decisive battles at sea. For the Royal Navy, the uncomfortable truth was that despite plans or desires for 'Mahanian' struggles on the high seas, action with the enemy for its sailors was more likely to be found fighting on land side-by-side with the marines, and on occasion with the Army, in the littoral regions and coastal waters, rivers, and further inland. The war in South Africa, predominantly a land war, had brought the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines only limited recognition for their role in bringing up naval guns to relieve besieged towns. In contrast, their home communities celebrated them as heroes worthy of commemoration.⁵¹⁵ The collective experiences of the naval brigades did, however, highlight another example of how a naval expeditionary force might quickly be inserted for land operations. Coordinating these with efforts on land were more problematic with changes underway in the navy, and by the 1880s a renewed British interest in naval affairs. During this period, however, the Royal Navy begrudgingly or from lack of imagination, did not give up on the idea that the marines were a part of the fabric of ships at sea – marines manned guns, and could go ashore when needed. The question posed by many, was whether it was either time to dissolve the Marines once and for all or instead find them a new role.

⁵¹² G.A. Schomberg, RMA, "Shall We Retain the Marines?", *The Nineteenth Century: a monthly review*, May 1883, in March 1877 – December 1900, 13, no. 75, 795.

⁵¹³ Harding, *Modern Naval History*, 5.

⁵¹⁴ As previously noted, the works of Alfred Thayer Mahan had a profound impact on how naval strategists and navies understood the implementation of naval power using large fleets. See, A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Seapower upon History*, 1660-1763; and A.T. Mahan, *Sea Power in its relation to the War of 1812*, Vols. I, II.

⁵¹⁵ Brad Beaven, *Visions of Empire*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) 70-90.

So far, this thesis has argued that the period of 1827 to 1927 was among the most difficult for the Corps. This chapter examines how the Royal Marines and others envisioned a new role. Tracing progress through the last half of the nineteenth century up to the First World War, this chapter will reveal how some innovative thoughts came into conflict with the realities of Admiralty administration. This chapter argues that the Royal Marines failed to seize an opportunity to innovate. Constrained in part by the navalist thinking in the Royal Navy which favoured fleets and ships, opportunities to better define the link between operations at sea with operations ashore were overlooked. As shown in the previous chapter, the experience of the naval brigades might have informed new opportunities for the Marines to seize upon a role within the navy to deliver such an operational capability and mission. While today, the Royal Marines are regarded as experts in amphibious warfare, it will be shown here that when asked the Marines were not well organised to deliver such a capability for the nation.⁵¹⁶ During this period, its status was no longer assured, and it was forced to conduct serious contemplation of what its purpose and future existence might be when more traditional purposes ceased to exist. Britt Zerbe has examined both the operational doctrine and identity of the Royal Marines in its earliest years, arguing that “the creation of an operational doctrine and identity”, was key to the success of the marines in this period.⁵¹⁷ Specifically, Zerbe’s argument establishes this period between the Corps’ inception up to 1802:

[the Marines] developed the purpose and training regime to solidify their very existence. This operational doctrine was never to be placed in one document nor done by a single person. Instead the doctrine was an amalgamation of ideas, published materials, training strategies and combat experiences throughout this period. The system shows over this period in a growing development of an overarching doctrine for action on land and at sea. Marines possessed an incredible amount of operational flexibility for the eighteenth-century military institution. In battles or campaigns marines could be formed into special battalions for key land operations or the units on various naval ships could be used in a variety of mixed sized force operations. They were used as a mobile reserve force that could attack strategic areas or work as a tactical diversion before the main strike on another area. Ultimately, this flexibility and multi-dimensional aspects of their operational doctrine enhanced the Marines’ own sense of their amphibious military identity.⁵¹⁸

What constitutes doctrine? Arguably, a history of common practice, a catalogue of previous experiences, contemporary reflection and published writings on the subject of

⁵¹⁶ See HC Defence Committee, “Oral evidence: The Royal Marines and UK amphibious capability”, HC 622, 5 December 2017, 3; HC Defence Committee, “Sunset for the Royal Marines? The Royal Marines and UK amphibious capability”, Third Report of Session 2017–19, 4 February 2018, pp 1-54.

⁵¹⁷ Zerbe, *The Birth of the Royal Marines*, 254.

⁵¹⁸ Zerbe, 13.

amphibious warfare constituted a body of work available for reference in the planning and execution of these operational tasks. Zerbe argues the early amphibious doctrine was, essentially, not codified but instead assimilated in best practices.⁵¹⁹ The Marines had indeed served historically with the navy ashore in 'cutting out' operations and later with the naval brigades, however, this role would come to define their operational function as will be shown. As will be explained, despite their training as soldiers and knowledge of both land and seaborne operations, they were not properly organised or equipped for these missions. The ideas, strategies and experiences detailed by Zerbe were in conflict with the later experience of the naval brigades who once ashore, were not able to operate as an independent landing force and were always to be found under the direct command of either navy or army officers. While the Marines had the latitude to define aspects of their own unique culture and identity, the more important matters of operational role and mission remained in the hands of the Admiralty. Later as some officers in their ranks sought to influence and innovate the creation of a more active role for the Marines, adoption of these proposed changes confronted fiscal realities and navalist doctrine focused instead on fleets and ships. This chapter will show that for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Royal Marines struggled to guide or influence the development of Britain's amphibious doctrine; the role they would actively play in this mission remained very much in doubt.

Early examples of British amphibious operations were not left unstudied in this period. Joint operations, understood simply in this period as the army and navy working together towards a common aim, was not unknown or unstudied. Achieving it was a different matter. These problems concerned what was understood even then as amphibious operations. Richard Harding has argued that, unlike the amphibious operations which dominated the twentieth century, the act of landing forces ashore was less significant to the success of overall operations in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. Reasons for this include the fact that Britain seldom faced a significant naval threat, enjoyed the benefits of ports and supplies from its colonies and in certain cases, such as in India and America, could rely on locally raised forces.⁵²⁰

Richard Harding has also refocused our attention to the significance of amphibious operations in relation to seapower and the projection of power from the sea. For Britain, Harding has cited how our understanding of the role and importance of amphibious operations in British history has been obscured in part by the navalist debates of the 1890s and continental strategy of 1914-1918.⁵²¹ Harding has argued that British warfare in the Baltic, Levant, American colonies and India was by necessity essentially amphibious

⁵¹⁹ Zerbe, *The Birth of the Royal Marines*, 205.

⁵²⁰ Richard Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare: 1650-1830*, (London: UCL Press, 1999) 212.

⁵²¹ Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, 284-285.

not blue water – as there were few key set battles at sea. The battlefleet could not account for the success of the expeditionary force once landed, but without the support and covering warships commanders would not attempt landings on the enemy homelands.⁵²² John Beeler has argued in particular how the mid-nineteenth century invasion scares which had repeatedly led to irresponsible spending on fortifications, as well as the fleet and the army.⁵²³ Beeler critiques, with few exceptions, those historians of the late-nineteenth century British navy who have uncritically accepted the theories of the “blue water school” of naval power perpetuated by Mahan, but also British advocates such as the previously cited Philip Colomb, John Fisher, and Alexander Milne.⁵²⁴ These influential persons were among those who advocated a British navy in excess of the “two-power standard” governing the size of the fleet at home and abroad, further stretching the British economy and further frustrating politicians.⁵²⁵ Consequently, the navalist outlook beyond shipbuilding at this time left little room for the introduction or innovation within the navy for consideration of other stratagems, such as operations in the littoral and closer cooperation between the army and the navy; a precursor to combined operations.

“Shall we retain the Marines?”

In 1879 the journal of Charles Dickens Jr., *All Year Round*, gave a detailed history of the Corps with a flattering portrayal.⁵²⁶ The article recounted the Corps’ notable service, but also alluded to its status of relative inferiority to the other services and even its being “raised with the object of forming a nursery to man the fleet”, which will be shown in the next part of this thesis, while an unhelpful characterisation it was nevertheless accurate to the navy’s use of the marines at this time.⁵²⁷ The article likewise highlighted the abuse by the navy of sinecure roles within the Marines held by navy officers, their inferior status when serving with the army on land.⁵²⁸ While commenting on the “more permanent appearance” of the Marines in their seaport establishments,⁵²⁹ the article commented on the developing arguments and theories surrounding their apparent demise and consignment as relics of Britain’s nautical past:

The Royal Marines will, in all probability, lose in a short time their amphibious character. Now that ironclads have taken the place of stately three-deckers, what becomes of the Marine, except for dockyard service and siege operations? There is no room for him on the deck of the *Inflexible*, or other monsters "backed," not like a

⁵²² Richard Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, 285.

⁵²³ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, 244.

⁵²⁴ Beeler, 249-250.

⁵²⁵ Beeler, 250-257.

⁵²⁶ Charles Dickens Jr. was the son of the more famous Dickens of the same name. The elder Dickens had founded a journal, *All the Year Round*, which was later edited by his son. Charles Dickens Jr., “Told of The Marines”, *All the Year Round*, 18 October 1879 pp. 420-426.

⁵²⁷ Dickens, 421.

⁵²⁸ Dickens, 425.

⁵²⁹ Dickens, 426.

whale, but a tortoise. His musketry will never be needed in ships carrying cannon ranging from thirty-five to a hundred tons, and playing at long shots with their tremendously heavy metal.⁵³⁰

This statement framed for a reading audience the challenges faced by the Marines in adapting to the changing times. Suggesting the Marines had outlived their utility within the Royal Navy, the article ominously, though regretfully, concluded the Marines might see their eventual absorption into the army:

Perhaps the Marines may live to see their infantry and artillery added to the line and the regular batteries, but whenever this moment may come a twinge of regret will be felt at the disappearance from among England's battalions of the motto, "Per mare, per Terram," under which so many gallant deeds have been done.⁵³¹

In May 1883, General George Augustus Schomberg, retired from a long career in the Royal Marines Artillery, having achieved the pinnacle rank of his Corps as Deputy Adjutant General,⁵³² penned an article hoping to highlight the precarious future of the Royal Marines. The question he hoped to entice the public, military planners, and government purse holders alike to ponder was "whether the Royal Marines shall be retained as part of the armed force of England".⁵³³ The question pre-occupied Schomberg, he had given similar thoughts and arguments to an essay read at the Royal United Services Institute in 1871⁵³⁴. Schomberg believed the question before the navy of the continued usefulness of the Marines was being ignored and needed resolution.⁵³⁵

As shown in the last chapter, utilising marines as a military reserve for use aboard the navy's ships was a well-established practice. To support the continuation of this practice, one observer stated that in the case of "a sudden war", ships with full complements of marines had at their disposal "a floating army", manned with complements of "the finest soldiers in the world, on the spot and at once available."⁵³⁶ At the outbreak of a war, Schomberg stated, "the Marines are now the first reserve of the Navy, and, with the Coastguard, form the only reserve to be depended on to embark by telegraph at a sudden outbreak of war."⁵³⁷ Schomberg alerted his readers to the fact that the navy had changed, that "the ships are now mere fighting machines, in which most of the heavy labour is

⁵³⁰ Dickens, "Told of the Marines", 426.

⁵³¹ Dickens, 426.

⁵³² *The London Gazette*, 12 July 1872, Issue 23875, p. 3146.

⁵³³ G.A. Schomberg, RMA, "Shall We Retain the Marines?", *The Nineteenth Century: a monthly review*, May 1883, in March 1877 – December 1900, Vol. 13, Issue 75, 795.

⁵³⁴ Major General Schomberg, RMA, "Are the Royal Marine Forces a Necessary Auxiliary to the Royal Navy?", *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, 15, no. 64, (1871): 486-507.

⁵³⁵ Schomberg, "Are the Royal Marine Forces a Necessary Auxiliary to the Royal Navy?", 489.

⁵³⁶ Captain Matthew Connolly, R.N., "Remarks on manning the navy, and subjects connected therewith", cited from *The Manning Of The Royal Navy: Selected Public Pamphlets, 1693-1873*, Navy Records Society, (London: Navy Records Society, 1976), 119, p. 249.

⁵³⁷ Schomberg, "Shall We Retain the Marines?", 795; Schomberg, "Are the Royal Marine Forces a Necessary Auxiliary to the Royal Navy?", 487.

performed by machinery, not by manual labour. Fleets will be manoeuvred in action under steam, not under sail.”⁵³⁸ As to manning, Schomberg suggested that improved mobility and the coal needed to feed it, as well as the improved lethality of modern guns, had seen that “the stoker and the gunner must take the place of many sailors”.⁵³⁹

Schomberg could also not withhold comment on the naval brigades. For Schomberg, the increased popularity among some naval officers and seamen participating in raids and other military actions as Schomberg saw best befitting soldiers was unnecessary: “The sailor, perhaps jealous for his estimation in public opinion, and for his power – a needless jealousy – has lately taken on himself the duties of the marine soldier, in addition to his other duties.”⁵⁴⁰ As these actions occurred with greater frequency since the Crimean War, Schomberg believed there were good grounds for such practices as detrimental to the best uses of naval officers, but also beyond their grasp:

The naval officer should be a perfect navigator, a good artilleryman, torpedoist, and electrician, a steam engineer, a military engineer, with a knowledge of international law, and of modern language or two. Besides all this, he often now aspires to be an infantry and artillery leader on land. Can the average officer compass all this? Is it for the advantage of the State he should attempt it?⁵⁴¹

Like others before, Schomberg was preoccupied with what role the marines might fill, now that many of their previous roles were becoming largely anachronistic, and further threatened by the navy stepping into roles believed to be best suited to marine training and expertise.

Schomberg saw solutions, like others before him, in a role for the marines in protecting far flung outposts, including coal depots. “We shall also at some future time, - it is so hoped, when not too late, - fortify our coaling depots in the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian and China waters. Who are to form the garrison of these posts?”, mused Schomberg.⁵⁴² He also saw a role for the marines as an auxiliary to the army, as it was already to the navy, a part it had already played in campaigns in Spain, Syria, China, India, Africa, and Egypt.⁵⁴³ Finally, Schomberg saw the marines as a colonial auxiliary to reinforce military forces in the far corners of the empire so that the army line regiments and artillery units might be “relieved of a portion of the burden of foreign service, which weighs heavily upon them, and, with the ever-recurring interruption of our small wars, renders the formation of a reserve for the army slow and difficult.”⁵⁴⁴

⁵³⁸ Schomberg, “Shall We Retain the Marines?”, 796.

⁵³⁹ Schomberg, 796.

⁵⁴⁰ Schomberg, 796.

⁵⁴¹ Schomberg, 796.

⁵⁴² Schomberg, 799.

⁵⁴³ Schomberg, 798.

⁵⁴⁴ Schomberg, 799.

John Colomb, the MP who much later would excoriate the navy on the mishandling of Graspan, summed up the problem of how the Royal Marines were considered amidst the services as, “they cannot therefore be thought - as a distinct branch of Her Majesty’s Service – too insignificant to be worthy of particular examination from a national point of view.”⁵⁴⁵ As to their current uses, Colomb believed, “the present use and application of marine forces, present a picture of confused anomalies and inconsistencies.”⁵⁴⁶ Colomb characterised the stagnation and uselessness of the current employment practice of Royal Marines Artillery officers in particular as follows: “When afloat the Marine Artillery Officer has no distinctive general artillery duties in the fleet. Their superior education and practical artillery knowledge, acquired at the expense of the State in order to fit them for duty as naval artillerists, are for general and naval purposes neither used nor applied.”⁵⁴⁷ In this statement, Colomb echoed the many personal observations of many a Marine Officer on the poor employment of their Corps.

Working with the navy, Colomb concluded the marine officer was the natural leader when men went ashore.⁵⁴⁸ As to other uses, Colomb, like Schomberg, earlier that year had advocated the use of the Marines as a colonial auxiliary.⁵⁴⁹ Besides utility as a reserve force for the navy, a fighting force of trained artillery men and soldiers aboard armed merchant steamers, as well as the “nucleus” for local Colonial forces garrisoning naval bases in the British colonies, Colomb believed another use of the marines might be best found as follows: “To provide organized bodies of troops for attack and defence of minor sea positions, free and untrammelled by a complicated army system, ill adapted to the military necessities of naval operations.”⁵⁵⁰ Essentially Colomb envisioned a situation where necessity might dictate the use of a naval expeditionary force, independent of the army, that might be used to strike the enemy on land. “It is hardly necessary to enlarge upon the necessity for Admirals having at their disposal a sufficiency of movable military force to seize and hold temporary positions during extended naval operations,” stated Colomb. The task organization of the army, Colomb believed, was not suited to operations from the sea.⁵⁵¹ The alternative then, while requiring reorganisation, might be the Royal Marines as their location at the dockyards might prove an advantage for rapid deployment. Colomb and Schomberg were not alone in these discussions.

In his 1882 prize essay submission to the Royal United Services Institution, Royal Navy Captain Cyprian A. G. Bridge, examined the problems of inefficient manpower resourcing. Bridge cited the problem of retaining a significant force of the navy’s officers on half-pay,

⁵⁴⁵ Colomb, “The Use and Application of Marine Forces: Past, Present, and Future”, 89.

⁵⁴⁶ Colomb, 90.

⁵⁴⁷ Colomb, 102.

⁵⁴⁸ Colomb, 101.

⁵⁴⁹ Colomb, 110.

⁵⁵⁰ Colomb, 109.

⁵⁵¹ Colomb, 110.

suggesting it was an “extravagance” the country could ill afford of “paying one man to do nothing, and another man to what the former could perform perfectly well.”⁵⁵² He commented further on another anomaly as he termed it, “in which marines are invariably sent to sea, whilst considerable numbers of seamen are learning to be [unseamanlike] in harbour ships,” stating further, “It is doubtful if keeping marines afloat at all serves any useful purpose in these days.”⁵⁵³ He suggested another use inspired in part by a practice of the French navy: “The proper employment of the corps, which all must admit is simply unequalled by any other body of soldiers, is unquestionably that which France, viz., to garrison the naval ports and strategic *insular* Colonies.”⁵⁵⁴ Similar to Colomb and Schomberg, Bridge recommended that beyond the British Isles, Malta, Bermuda, St Helena, the Falkland Islands, Hong Kong, and the Fijian islands might all be garrisoned by marines in favour of army soldiers.⁵⁵⁵

In 1892, the Royal United Services Institution awarded their Naval Prize Essay to Royal Navy Captain Robert W. Craigie.⁵⁵⁶ Craigie’s ideas were in part rooted in naval chauvinism, but in other ways were quite progressive. Craigie advocated a strong surface fleet to “sweep” the high seas and patrol the vital sea lanes which were the arteries of the empire. Fixed defences at key ports and coaling stations at home and abroad would be manned by sailors, and some marines, under naval officers where the army might not be able to break up its line regiments. Traditionally, fixed defences would have been manned exclusively by the army and sparring over the relevance of fleets versus forts in the nation’s defence often erupted between the Admiralty and the War Office. In at least one progressive measure, Craigie advocated the services be united under one ministry and a Minister for War; something which would not materialise in fact until after the First World War.⁵⁵⁷ Discussion ensued following Craigie’s, and other submissions for the Naval Prize Essay. The solutions proposed by Craigie for the utilisation of the marines did not satisfy Marine Major Thomas Field Dunscomb Bridge.⁵⁵⁸ Bridge advocated a more imaginative role for the marines, but his comment emphasised a widely held conviction among many of his officer peers that the Royal Marines were poorly utilised by the Admiralty, and worse still, undervalued: “The proudest boast of the Marines is that they are an integral part of the Navy: they are sister Services, but the role of Cinderella is not the role many care to

⁵⁵² Colomb, “The Use and Application of Marine Forces, 648.

⁵⁵³ Captain Cyprian A. G. Bridge, RN, “Suggestions for Improving the efficiency of the Personnel of the Navy and its Reserves”, *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, Jan 27 1882 Vol 26, No 117, 648.

⁵⁵⁴ Bridge, “Suggestions for Improving the efficiency of the Personnel of the Navy and its Reserves”, 648.

⁵⁵⁵ Bridge, 648.

⁵⁵⁶ Captain Robert W. Craigie, RN., “Maritime Supremacy Being Essential For The General Protection Of The British Empire And Its Commerce, To What Extent, If Any, Should Our Naval Force Be Supplemented By Fixed Defences At Home And Abroad, And To Whom Should Be Confided?”, *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, 1892, Vol. 36, Issue 173, 391-415.

⁵⁵⁷ Craigie, “Maritime Supremacy”, 410.

⁵⁵⁸ Major Thomas Bridge at this time was a Royal Marines Officer serving with the Royal Marines Light Infantry at Chatham. He would later serve as Aide de Camp to both Queen Victoria and to King Edward VII. He would retire in September 1905 from his last post as Colonel Commandant of the Royal Marine Training Depot at Deal and placed on the retired list in the honorary rank of Major General, see *The London Gazette*, 29 September 1905, 27840, p. 6565.

play.”⁵⁵⁹ Colonel Moody of the RMLI voiced his belief that Craigie’s suggestions left the marines with little to do and that an opportunity was being lost by not using the marines in safeguarding one of the nation’s essential supply chains, namely, the coaling stations essential to the Royal Navy:

Both branches, the seamen and Marines are highly trained; but I maintain that the country does not get its full value of the Marines. This corps is capable of economical and rapid extension. It is cheap and very efficient; it can be largely increased without in the smallest degree impairing its efficiency as a naval force. At coaling stations, there being a nucleus, the force could take their turn for sea in the ships on the station, being relieved by a similar number afloat.⁵⁶⁰

Moody proposed a garrison role for guarding coaling stations but keeping a force in readiness for augmentation or relief of a marine force already at sea. Continuing, he reflected on the precarious nature of the Corps’ future:

Thus, by placing the coaling stations under naval control, and employing the Royal Marines to man them, you will increase the efficiency of the corps, which will then have a future, as at present I am tempted to fear they have not, and last, but not least, the pocket of the country will be spared.⁵⁶¹

In appealing to an economic argument, Moody endeavoured to elicit some sympathy, if not regard, for the apparent frugal nature of the Corps as an economy of force to the nation:

In conclusion, I would say, think on these facts, and do not overlook this branch of the Service, but let the corps, which is proud of its connection with our naval history of the past, have a more pronounced share in the naval history of the future, a share for which they have honestly striven to qualify themselves by steady discipline and patient perseverance, turning their hand to anything required, and keeping well abreast of the professional changes of the past half century, that they may be well able when the struggle comes to bear their part in the defence of this great Empire.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁹ Quoted from Captain Robert W. Craigie, RN., “Maritime Supremacy Being Essential For The General Protection Of The British Empire And Its Commerce, To What Extent, If Any, Should Our Naval Force Be Supplemented By Fixed Defences At Home And Abroad, And To Whom Should Be Confided?”, *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, 36, no. 173, (1892) 758.

⁵⁶⁰ “Discussion on the Subject of the Naval Prize Essays, Viz.,” *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, 36, no. 173, (1892) 757.

⁵⁶¹ “Discussion on the Subject of the Naval Prize Essays, Viz.,” 757.

⁵⁶² “Discussion on the Subject of the Naval Prize Essays, Viz.,” 757.

The arguments made by Colonel Moody along economic lines were also supported by John Colomb. Colomb, in another essay, framed his argument around what he saw as the fiscal gaffe of the Admiralty on poorly employed but expensively trained marines:

The Admiralty spends the public money in giving the officers of this great service scientific education and elaborate training second to none of corresponding arms of the Army, and to the non-commissioned officers, gunners, and privates, the most careful and perfect military teaching. Superadded to all this the marine infantry are instructed in naval gunnery, while the marine artillery are worked up, at great cost of money and time, to the highest pitch of perfection and skill in the use and practice of naval ordnance as well as land artillery.⁵⁶³

Colomb sought to underscore the folly of having trained these officers, only to have them unused: "Having got the officers and men, the Admiralty then train them at great cost...and when thus in possession of magnificent and expensively trained corps of artillery and infantry, the next step is to suppress the officers and waste the whole service."⁵⁶⁴

What was not being defined clearly by any of these authors, despite the apparent necessity, was the need for some form of combined operations. As already noted, some military professionals and strategic thinkers by the late nineteenth century were, firstly, envisioning the need for the army and the navy to work better together, and secondly, some delineation as to the roles and responsibilities; the latter especially, was to be a difficult process to sort out. For Colomb, however, of principal concern was the matters arising from a landed force of marines in operations with the army:

When, however, Marine Artillery or Infantry Officers are landed as part of a naval force for fighting on shore they are under the Navy Discipline Act and the command, direction, and control of naval Officers. So that Officers, carefully and specially trained by the State for military operations on the land, are placed in the face of an enemy under the guidance and direction of Officers carefully and specially trained for naval operations on the water.⁵⁶⁵

This important problem highlighted by Colomb would preoccupy strategists and planners alike. Schomberg also reflected on the roles and responsibilities of the services in combined operations, but accepted the challenge would be great:

[The] position and responsibility of officers and men while serving afloat should be laid down for the guidance and discipline of landing parties from ships, whether

⁵⁶³ John Colomb, "Waste and Confusion in the Navy", *The National Review*, March 1900, 129.

⁵⁶⁴ Colomb, "Waste and Confusion", 129.

⁵⁶⁵ Colomb, "The Use and Application of Marine Forces", 102.

Marine of Naval Brigade. But the above proposal appears, to one who has given much thought to the case, to be the only remedy for a great difficulty.⁵⁶⁶

Philip Colomb reflected on what had to take place for the betterment of the defence of the nation:

I think the first thing we may note is; the recognition that the defence of this Empire is naval and military; that it is not, as it used to be said, that the Army is to be left alone to defend the ports and forts, and so on, and that the Navy is to do something else not defined. I think it is now better understood that the two Services work together; did work in the past, and will work in the future.⁵⁶⁷

This also required a consideration as to how warfare itself or the nature of conflicts was in a state of change. For naval thinkers, much attention was given to the writings of Mahan on matters such as 'sea communications', which Mahan concluded: "were the most important single element in national power and strategy. The ability to insure one's own communications and to interrupt an adversary's is at the root of national power, and is the prerogative of the sea powers."⁵⁶⁸ The purpose of naval strategy, according to Mahan, was to gain control of the sea and the destruction of the enemy fleet was the first task of a navy in war. Once the enemy fleet was destroyed, a victorious navy could then exploit its resulting control of the sea for any further purpose desired.⁵⁶⁹ Consequently, Mahan's emphasis on the destruction of the enemy's fleet and control of the sea lanes meant that other forms of naval warfare, such as commerce raiding, were neglected. The Royal Navy therefore was preparing for the next Trafalgar. Mahan's focus on concepts such as the decisive sea battle, based in large part on his own conclusions and analysis of the earlier success of the Royal Navy, influenced many of the world's major navies to expect and to plan for such an eventuality. Ironically, it was precisely the other aspects of naval warfare, such as war in the littoral regions, in which the Royal Navy was most engaged, demonstrated in part by their expanded use of the naval brigades.⁵⁷⁰ Yet by the time of Mahan's writings, Great Britain with such a large empire was now losing the ability to protect all her maritime and colonial interests with a fleet concentrated in European waters.⁵⁷¹

The evidence presented so far demonstrate real discussions were taking place on for an updated role for the Corps, but it is argued here that these lacked real invention and innovation to promote real change. The proposals of mooring Marines in remote coaling

⁵⁶⁶ Schomberg, "Shall We Retain the Marines?", 800.

⁵⁶⁷ "Discussion on the Subject of the Naval Prize Essays, Viz.," *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, 36, no. 173, (1892) 762.

⁵⁶⁸ Quoted from, Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973) 174.

⁵⁶⁹ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 175.

⁵⁷⁰ Hore, *Seapower Ashore: 200 Years of Royal Navy Operations on Land*, 17.

⁵⁷¹ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 179.

stations and outposts across the empire were consigning the Marines to static defensive roles instead of a role where a strike from the sea might be permitted. What the Marines needed was a fresh role or indeed an improvement to an existing one which underscored a unique quality or capability which they provided. Fortunately, these came to light at last at the end of the century. Problematically, however, the Marines still faced a real challenge in convincing the Admiralty this was needed.

Strike from the sea

The naval brigades offered some demonstrable advantages to the navy having a flexible option for placing its own troops ashore. This idea of linking naval operations with those ashore was not new, but gained increased prominence by the late nineteenth century. Julian Corbett, a strategist and naval author, crucially advanced the view in his book *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, that navies could instead focus in assisting land warfare if amphibious forces were increased.⁵⁷² Corbett was one of the first naval theorists in his writings to stress the importance of integrating land and sea forces in a national strategy. Using Clausewitz' idea of limited aims or objectives, Corbett in *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, cited disenchantment with decisive battles, preferring a concept of geographically shifting and limited sea control.⁵⁷³ For Corbett, the issue involved controlling vital areas of the sea, as opposed to commanding the vast ocean. Corbett praised inter-service cooperation and amphibious operations, believing that elements of military power should work together. Corbett viewed naval strategy as determining a fleet's movements in an overall maritime strategy that included land forces. As Andrew Lambert has elucidated in his analysis of Corbett's works for consideration in the modern era, Corbett believed Britain was first and foremost a seapower which needed a maritime strategy led by the navy.⁵⁷⁴ He cautioned against unaided naval pressure - stating that purely naval action could only work through a process of exhaustion where naval action alone would be unable to decide a military contest, even resulting in an inconclusive political settlement where each side saw itself as the victor.⁵⁷⁵ Strategy for war had to include a combined military and maritime strategy where the mutual relations between the army and the navy were paramount. The operational application of Corbett's theory encompassed the Clausewitz theory of war with a maritime focus - making a distinction between naval and maritime strategy:

Possessions that lie overseas or at the extremities of vast areas of imperfectly settled territory are in an entirely different category from those limited objects which

⁵⁷² Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, 19-27.

⁵⁷³ Corbett, 19-27.

⁵⁷⁴ Andrew Lambert, *21st Century Corbett: Maritime Strategy and Naval Policy for the Modern Era*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2017), 18.

⁵⁷⁵ Lambert, *21st Century Corbett*, 12-13.

Clausewitz contemplated. History shows that . . . they can be isolated by naval action sufficiently to set up the conditions of true limited war.⁵⁷⁶

Corbett stressed here the importance of doctrinal cohesion between army and navy was essential. Obsession with Mahan and the decisive battle was not desirable for the navy, the army's pining for a mass of men for land confrontation was equally untenable; regrettably, both were sought in the First World War. For Corbett, naval warfare represented a spectrum that was offensive and defensive, limited, and unlimited in nature from blockade to war of extermination. He concluded that limited war was therefore the essence of maritime strategy. This sort of strategic thinking had enabled Great Britain, a maritime nation with a traditionally small army acting in conjunction with a powerful fleet, to become a truly global empire. Corbett's emphasis on limited war and the importance of what was now being referred to as 'combined operations'.⁵⁷⁷ Two Royal Marine officers were distinguishable for their vision of a better role for the Corps indelibly linked to amphibious warfare and defined it in writing.

Two innovators: Hankey and Aston

George Aston of the Royal Marines Artillery, whose observations on life in the Marines has been previously cited, had intellectual interests formed in part by an unusual military career. As a young officer, he had served with the Royal Marines battalion during the 1884 expedition to the Sudan and seen combat.⁵⁷⁸ During the South African War he worked mainly in logistics, and then later as a divisional intelligence officer until his health failed and he was sent home.⁵⁷⁹ Putting aside these operational experiences, Aston's career was mainly a succession of staff and teaching posts at the Royal Naval College at Greenwich, training marine officers including the young Maurice Hankey.⁵⁸⁰ Hankey would describe Aston as, "a very inspiring person", who in turn, "pitched loyalty to the Service tremendously high – which he got right home to me."⁵⁸¹ At the college, both naval officers and army officers In order to put their rather mundane syllabus in a wider context, Aston included lectures on the nature of the British Empire and its defence problems.⁵⁸² Among his students was Maurice Hankey.

In chapter two it was shown how the modern day Royal Marines have renewed an emphasis in their present day mission on littoral strike. The originator of this concept was in a fact a Royal Marine who wrote extensively on the subject. Better known for his later role in the wartime cabinet of the 1940s and as a member of the Committee for Imperial

⁵⁷⁶ Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, 26.

⁵⁷⁷ Corbett, 19-27.

⁵⁷⁸ Aston described in detail his participation in the Sudan campaign in Aston, *Memories*, 44-55.

⁵⁷⁹ Aston, *Memories*, 203, 212.

⁵⁸⁰ Stephen Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets, Vol. I, 1877-1918*, (London: Collins, 1970), 33.

⁵⁸¹ Roskill, *Hankey*, 33.

⁵⁸² Aston, *Memories*, 180.

Defence during the First World War, Maurice Hankey began his career as Royal Marines Artillery Officer, first training at Greenwich in August 1895.⁵⁸³ As a young officer, Hankey was noteworthy among his peers for his ability to coalesce and articulate in writing his thoughts on the proper employment of his Corps. In 1899, Hankey went to sea aboard HMS *Ramillies*, leading the marine detachment, and would experience some of the friction between the navy and marines and particularly the officers. He deplored “the excessive importance attached to ‘spit and polish’”, and the inactivity of the life and few duties a Marine officer held on ship.⁵⁸⁴ Hankey, “burning with professional zeal”, resolutely devoted as much time to as he could learning aspects of the navy and the various occupations to be found at sea from engineering to gunnery.⁵⁸⁵ It was also from this time that Hankey began to write and reflect on “warfare in the littoral”, studying historical examples on what role naval forces might play in the projection of military power from the sea, periodically adding to these writings at intervals until 1908.⁵⁸⁶ Hankey’s biographer, Stephen Roskill, later suggested that the sum of Hankey’s writings on littoral warfare amounted to a proposal some forty years before their incarnation, for the navy’s adoption of a version of the Royal Marines Commandos.⁵⁸⁷ Hankey’s ideas, uncannily prescient, had the early signs of real innovation in terms of a new opportunity for the Royal Marines. Aston would likewise write at length on amphibious warfare, believing opportunities for success in war lay in the coordination of army and naval forces. Despite their mutual interests on defining a better Corps mission, their views would in fact clash over the idea of maintaining a separate Corps identity.

Hankey, like Aston, envisioned better cooperation between the navy and the army, and saw the future of the navy also in littoral strike, stating, “the Navy will be called upon to undertake operations upon the enemy’s coastline.”⁵⁸⁸ Using early historical examples, of which some were learned in Aston’s classroom, Hankey cited the importance of advanced bases from which navies might operate from. Reflecting on more recent examples, Hankey considered the role of the US Marines at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, working with the US Navy in the Spanish American War in Cuba in 1898. By seizing and using advanced bases for actions against the Spanish, Hankey concluded that “without an advanced based at Guantanamo the United States could never have sustained their fleet concentrated and efficient off Santiago de Cuba”.⁵⁸⁹ Practical uses of such landing operations, according to Hankey, were in “littoral warfare more particularly in relation to

⁵⁸³ Andrew Lambert described Hankey as “the egregious and self-promoting secretary of the CID”, Andrew Lambert, *21st Century Corbett*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2017), 15; CCA, *The Hankey Papers*, from here annotated as HNKY. HNKY 23/11, Letter to Hankey 29 August 1895 from Deputy Adjutant General, Royal Marines, appointment to Royal Marines Artillery, directs Hankey to Royal Naval College Greenwich.

⁵⁸⁴ Maurice Hankey, *The Supreme Command, 1914-1918, Vol. I.*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1961) 13-14.

⁵⁸⁵ Hankey, *The Supreme Command*, 13; Roskill, *Hankey*, 39-42.

⁵⁸⁶ HNKY 6/1, Chapters on “Warfare on the littoral”.

⁵⁸⁷ Stephen Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets, Vol. I, 1877-1918*, (London: Collins, 1970) 66.

⁵⁸⁸ HNKY 6/1, Chapters on “Warfare on the littoral”.

⁵⁸⁹ HNKY 6/1, Chapters on “Warfare on the littoral”.

the action of a field army”.⁵⁹⁰ The specific purpose being, “to dislodge a hostile fleet from a defended port in which it had taken refuge”, such as the work of US Marines on land working in support of the US fleet at Santiago Bay in Cuba. Hankey cited how the US Navy regularly utilised marines from their fleet to accomplish this objective, as the Spanish forces had first to be ejected: “Thus the United States were obliged to employ a considerable force of Marines to expel the Spanish riflemen from positions from which they could harass the ships lying in Guantanamo Bay, and subsequently a permanent garrison had to be maintained there.”⁵⁹¹ Other aims for the use of such landing forces, Hankey claimed, included “to capture any possession required for the use of the fleet, or as an asset at the termination of the war,” and “to cooperate with allies or make a diversion in their favour, of which the Peninsula War is an example”.⁵⁹² Hankey also cited the examples of the Japanese use of Elliott islands against the Russians for similar purposes in the Russo-Japanese War:

[It] will be easily seen that the work required from the officers & men will be very arduous, & exacting but I am certain there would be no lack of volunteers to join a force of this description, the fact of belonging to a [“Corps de’lite”] such as this would be [&] feeling that we were assisting our comrades of the Naval Executive, would make every individual in the force work up to the limits of his capacity, & such a body of men would be invaluable to any country in its hour of need.⁵⁹³

Hankey was building a strong case for a better use of the Royal Marines, reorganised, refocused, and still nested in the Royal Navy, but with a clearer aim and mission. These early writings in part formed the substance of a paper Hankey submitted in 1904 to the Royal Marines Headquarters he titled, “Paper On Royal Marine Advanced Naval Base”, where it was duly reviewed by the Deputy Adjutant General.⁵⁹⁴ Hankey’s concept of a “Mobile Naval Base” would later be implemented much later in 1920, but at this time it was noted merely as “a good suggestion” by senior officers.⁵⁹⁵ The document included detailed equipment lists, a proposed organisational structure, and his thoughts on what the forces would require in the way of readiness, as well as the intense regime of training. The concepts were not adopted, and it is not recorded what either the Admiralty or Royal Marines Headquarters made of these ideas, but as will be shown in the next chapter the concept was again examined following the First World War.

⁵⁹⁰ HNKY 6/1, Chapters on “Warfare on the littoral”.

⁵⁹¹ HNKY 6/1.

⁵⁹² HNKY 6/1.

⁵⁹³ HNKY 6/2, “Paper On Royal Marine Advanced Naval Base”, c. 1904, 8.

⁵⁹⁴ HNKY 6/2, 8.

⁵⁹⁵ Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets*, Vol. I, 67.

This paper was developed further into, “A Suggested Improvement in the Composition of the Military Forces of Great Britain”, as a continuation of his thoughts on littoral warfare and what the appropriate military or naval force might be for the task:

In reviewing the constitution of the military forces nothing is more striking from a naval point of view than the absence in them of any body of men which can be despatched at a moment’s notice and without attracting public attention for an enterprise across the sea such as the occupation of a flying advanced naval base. Yet in devising plans for a naval action the need of such a force is constantly felt.⁵⁹⁶

Properly organised and equipped, Hankey believed the Royal Marines to be the best force suited to the task:

The solution of the question appears to lie in an expansion of the Royal Marines to fill this gap in our military organization. The Marines by their present organization and training, no less than by their traditions, are peculiarly qualified to fill this role. The whole organization of their barracks is based on the principle that they must be ready for instant mobilization, and frequent surprise tests have proved the perfection of their arrangements in this respect.⁵⁹⁷

Hankey suggested marines might even be embarked to “defend a flying base such as Scapa Flow”, which would take place.⁵⁹⁸ A battalion from each Division could be held in readiness at “[RM] barracks at Devonport, Chatham, and Gosport, respectively, and the artillery portion of the force would be furnished from the [RMA] barracks at Eastney.”⁵⁹⁹ In order to rehearse and trial such an eventually, Hankey proposed marines take part in army manoeuvres, citing the fact that marine officers “are already trained for military as well as for naval service.”⁶⁰⁰ Citing the recent example of Japanese naval rifle companies in the Russo Japanese War, “a brigade of Marines”, Hankey suggested, “might be very useful to the army as a covering force in the event of a landing on a hostile coast”, or even he suggested, “any emergency requiring the early presence of troops, such as trouble in Egypt or China, or Crete, or any part of the British Empire.”⁶⁰¹ All this, Hankey stated, “would be gained without diminishing the military forces by a single man.”⁶⁰² Years later, the concept of a ‘Flying Corps’ or a ‘flying column’ proposed by Hankey of marines organised for rapid mobilisation from Britain’s dockyards was backed by Prince Louis of Battenburg, then Second Sea Lord, in 1912. By adding additional marine troops from the reserves to the existing ships detachments, a “mobile force” of some 350 marines, with

⁵⁹⁶ HNKY 7/1, “A Suggested Improvement in the Composition of the Military Forces of Great Britain”, 1908.

⁵⁹⁷ HNKY 7/1.

⁵⁹⁸ HNKY 7/1.

⁵⁹⁹ HNKY 7/1.

⁶⁰⁰ HNKY 7/1.

⁶⁰¹ HNKY 7/1.

⁶⁰² HNKY 7/1.

artillery, was deployed to Scapa Flow as a test of concept. The designed purpose was for “serving and holding an advanced base for the Fleet either in British, neutral, or hostile territory”⁶⁰³ Objections, however, from the Navy ranks revolved on the training of the detachment, but most of all by the fleet on their giving up marines from their ships for training duties ashore, which tied the fleet to a base on shore. Unable to unravel these administrative concerns, adoption of the procedure was shelved until just before the outbreak of the war.

Meanwhile, Aston’s ambition was to foster a greater cooperation between the army and the navy. In 1904, while at Greenwich, Aston would comment on the poor relations of his inter-service colleagues, observing that his naval colleagues ‘laboured under the delusion that [army officers] had little to do, and devoted most of their time to sport’.⁶⁰⁴ Aston’s solution was to provide a series of ‘staff rides’, in order to acquaint officers with the complexities of conducting landings on unopposed shores.⁶⁰⁵ The assumptions at this time were that any landing would be unopposed due to the volume and strength of modern firepower; an assumption that would prove fatal in later years at places such as Gallipoli. The college exercises seem to have followed what would later become formalised in the *Manual of Combined Naval and Military Operations*, in that they envisaged a small ‘covering force’ being landed overnight to allow the main disembarkation at dawn, followed by the build-up of a secure beachhead. Little attention seems to have been paid to subsequent operations such as penetration further inland or the redeployment of forces by sea. This omission presaged problems at Gallipoli, where the military commanders had been criticised for not driving forward to seize landward features or for lacking imagination in not carrying out fresh landings.⁶⁰⁶ For Aston, apart from acquainting army and naval officers with amphibious operations, the main benefit seems to have been the interaction between the two sides, both socially as well as professionally.⁶⁰⁷ Here a just criticism can be levelled at Aston’s ideas which did not serve to properly define the complex realities of inter-service relations. His belief that the empathetic bridging of service cultures through time spent together and mutual respect, might in turn somehow transcend the greater challenges of what could be defined as joint operations was a flaw in his philosophy.⁶⁰⁸ The next logical steps, perhaps, would have been a creation of a unified command structure or further delineating the relations between the naval commanders of the naval ‘sea lift’ and the landing forces. The output of Aston’s works and thought on this doctrinal evolution was his *Letters on Amphibious*

⁶⁰³ ADM 1/8665/134, “Functions and Training of the Royal Marines”, 1924.

⁶⁰⁴ Aston, *Memories*, 242.

⁶⁰⁵ Jim Beach, “The British Army, the Royal Navy, and the ‘big work’ of Sir George Aston, 1904–1914”, *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 29, 1, (February 2006), 151, 166.

⁶⁰⁶ Beach, “The British Army”, 151.

⁶⁰⁷ Aston, *Memories*, 242.

⁶⁰⁸ Beach, “The British Army”, 166-167.

Wars.⁶⁰⁹ Aston implored his readers, “not to confine your reading to the fascinating study of the strategic employment of mammoth armies in purely land warfare, but to turn your attention also to amphibious wars, in which the attacking force moved by sea.”⁶¹⁰

To this, Hankey suggested the ideal attacking force from the sea was not to be found with the British army expeditionary force or ‘BEF’: “Our military striking force is stationed at Aldershot, where it never even sees the ocean. Some considerable period must elapse before it can be mobilised, moved to a seaport, and embarked, and this cannot be done without the knowledge of the whole world.”⁶¹¹ Based in the dockyards, Hankey argued, the Royal Marines, once suitably organised and equipped, were the ideal choice: “It is submitted that a portion of the Royal Marines should be organised so as to provide the first detachment of our national striking force. The marines by their organisation and training no less than by their traditions are peculiarly qualified to undertake this responsibility.”⁶¹² Hankey believed that under certain conditions a naval landing force might be the best option to make a landing against an opposition force and create conditions for “assisting the landing of an army”.⁶¹³ Hankey sought to specify the conditions in which an eventual landing might take place, that it should, “conform to the general plan of campaign”, and be, “so far removed from the enemy’s centres of activity as to render serious opposition to the disembarkation unlikely”.⁶¹⁴ This was in keeping with the commonly held beliefs of avoiding an opposed landing where, “as a rule no landing should be carried out if there is any risk of interference by the enemy’s naval forces or within the range of permanent or movable artillery”.⁶¹⁵

While none of Hankey’s writings were ever published, his observations were instead incorporated into his briefs and statements in his work on committees and cabinet meetings. For example, a 1908 paper of Hankey’s on the “Organisation of an Expeditionary Force”, was reviewed by First Sea Lord Jackie Fisher when Hankey served as his aide in 1912, and again years later when Hankey served with the wartime cabinet in November 1914.⁶¹⁶ As a result, Hankey did have the opportunity to demonstrate his views on the topic of littoral warfare and how these might impact both the organisational construct of the Royal Marines, even at the expense of the Marines themselves.

⁶⁰⁹ George Aston, *Letters on Amphibious Wars* (London: John Murray 1911)

⁶¹⁰ Aston, *Letters on Amphibious Wars*, 45.

⁶¹¹ HNKY 6/4, “Marine Corps as National striking force”, 12 December 1906.

⁶¹² HNKY 6/4.

⁶¹³ HNKY 6/1, Chapters on “Warfare on the littoral”.

⁶¹⁴ HNKY 6/1.

⁶¹⁵ HNKY 6/1.

⁶¹⁶ Hankey’s early writings were compiled for a cabinet paper, “Organisation of an Expeditionary Force”, in 1905 which was read by First Sea Lord, Jackie Fisher. CAB 63/1, “Memorandum on the organisation of an expeditionary force, prepared by Commander T.E. Crease and Captain M.P.A. Hankey for Lord Fisher”, 1908-1914.

The Fisher-Selborne Scheme

The year 1902 saw the inauguration of John 'Jackie' Fisher's reforms of the Navy when as Second Sea Lord he began to deal with the personnel. Fisher's first significant policy which would affect the marines was known as the Selborne Scheme. In 1904 as First Sea Lord, Fisher would embark on an ultimately unsuccessful campaign which among other things sought the reform of naval officer selection and training which was to include the Marines. Firstly, it lowered the entry age for officer cadets and entered them by nomination and interview as opposed to competitive examination. This development alarmed many once discovered, believing that the Lords of the Admiralty now retained a gross amount of patronage over accession of applicants to the navy.⁶¹⁷ Second, and most harmful to the Royal Marines, it proposed common entry and training for Executive, Engineering and Royal Marine officers, all educated together in all three disciplines at the Osborne and Dartmouth schools and on Royal Navy ships at sea, until separation upon specialization after seven years. The funnelling of naval cadets into a 'marine option' for training as officers, ultimately threatened the officer fabric of the marines; officers would in essence be naval officers first, not marines. By this proposal to modify entrants for naval commissions, boys were entered for training as officers at the Royal Naval College, Osborne on the Isle of Wight at the age of 13, for all the three branches of the Navy designated as Executive, Engineering, and Marine. After a common training at Osborne, Dartmouth, and at sea, they were to become specialists in one of the three branches. In other ways, however, the scheme was of perhaps more benefit in breaking down, among other things, class barriers within the Royal Navy.⁶¹⁸

The scheme was met with criticism from many corners. In Parliament, it was debated, and considered by some as, "as the death sentence of the naval officer as he exists at present".⁶¹⁹ Colonel Henry Bowles, MP for Enfield, summarised his thoughts on the fallacies of the scheme:

The functions of the naval officer, the marine officer, and the engineer officer are diverse, and are daily becoming more diverse, and therefore their training should be diverse. There must be day by day more, and not less, specialisation, earlier and not later specialisation. But here is a scheme which generalises everybody, as though they were all to perform the same functions. The naval officer as he at present exists is admirable, but for that naval officer, who is a specialised seaman, engineer and

⁶¹⁷ HC Deb, 16 March 1903, Fourth Series, Vol. 119, cc896-897.

⁶¹⁸ For a more complete discussion of this unique aspect of the benefits of the Selbourne Scheme, see - Oliver Johnson, "Class Warfare and the Selborne Scheme: The Royal Navy's battle over technology and social hierarchy", *The Mariner's Mirror*, 100:4 (November 2014), 422-433.

⁶¹⁹ HC Deb, 16 March 1903, Fourth Series, Vol. 119, cc885.

man of science, you propose to substitute a hybrid, interchangeable popinjay, a jack-of-all-trades and master of none.⁶²⁰

In this session of Parliament, the appointment through this scheme for both engineer and marine officers was stopped with a vote in the Commons.⁶²¹ A commission was established to query the impact of the scheme at length and in July 1905, Hankey was called before the Douglas Committee to give evidence as an officer of the Royal Marines.⁶²² Under examination, Hankey was able to include his views on littoral warfare as well that of the complete integration of Royal Marine officers into the navy.⁶²³ Complete integration for Marine officers meant not only watch duties on ship, but that they would no longer be simply officers in charge of marines but in all things a naval officer to include uniforms.⁶²⁴ Colonel George Aston, the sole Marine officer on the panel, questioned Hankey further on the ramifications of total integration, “that to officer the Marines with Naval Officers would lead to the absorption of the whole Marine *Personnel* into the Navy.” Hankey affirmed this was his belief, officers and men would be designated for this mode of warfare much as any other specialisation in the navy, to which Hankey added, “I do not think it matters in the slightest what sort of coat a man wears; his training would be the same, and whether he wears a blue coat or a red coat or a sailor’s coat, I do not think it matters at all.”⁶²⁵ Hankey advocated the complete shedding of the Royal Marines identity, effectively the transformation of the Corps into a designated specialisation of the navy: amphibious warfare. For Hankey, that the navy adopted and retained a specialised organic function for his vision of littoral warfare was what mattered most, the survival of the Corps was, he stated, “more or less immaterial.”⁶²⁶ Hankey’s views in this sense, the abolition of the Corps to which he himself belonged, were extremely rare among Marine officers. Aston, in contrast, provided a written statement to the panel’s conclusions, “that the best officers entered through Osborne will wish to specialise in this direction; and it is questionable whether any will volunteer at all. The Royal Marine’s will thus speedily deteriorate, and will probably pass away.”⁶²⁷ Where Hankey saw opportunity at the expense of the loss of Corps identity, Aston could only denounce what he saw as the virtual extinction of his service.

Many more of the intended reforms of the scheme would be reversed over time but near term consequences of this disruption to new officer training had more immediate effects. Despite avoiding permanent changes to their officer training, the alteration of training

⁶²⁰ HC Deb, 16 March 1903, cc897.

⁶²¹ HC Deb, 16 March 1903, Fourth Series, Vol. 119, cc937-940.

⁶²² House of Commons, “Reports Departmental Committees Certain Questions Concerning The Extension Of The New Scheme Of Training For Officers Of The Navy, &c”, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1906) 103. Hereafter HC 1906.

⁶²³ Roskill, *Hankey*, 67; HC 1906, 103.

⁶²⁴ HC 1906, 103.

⁶²⁵ HC 1906, 103.

⁶²⁶ HC 1906, 103.

⁶²⁷ HC 1906, 67.

schemes for new Marines officers entering between 1902 and 1907 resulted in only three new Marine Officers obtained under the new scheme, of which two were returned to the Navy. In February 1907, the Marines had successfully petitioned their Captain-General, the Prince of Wales, for exemption from the scheme and to have them removed from it. Prince George stated, "that the new Admiralty scheme as regards the future of the Marine Officers will destroy the Military character of the Corps generally, which, I believe, is an essential for both discipline and efficiency."⁶²⁸ In a memorandum to Fisher the Prince stated, "I feel very proud of being Colonel-In-Chief of the Royal Marine, which Corps is universally considered the finest body of fighting men we have. It is impossible for me to concur in a proposal which I conscientiously believe will prove detrimental in every way to their discipline, efficiency, utility and general well-being."⁶²⁹ Damage was done all the same. New artillery officers, previously attending Woolwich, ceased training there altogether after 1907. A further five new officers transferred from Sandhurst and Woolwich over the next five years to the Corps. With these disruptions causing the flow of new officers to a trickle, the attainment of new officers became increasingly more urgent, it was decided to allow 'Direct Entry into the Corps', and the Order-in-Council of 9 August 1911 was published which dictated that officers for the Corps could enter immediately upon a successful direct examination.⁶³⁰ As new First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill assigned some blame to the Corps, "because no foresight had been given" between the crucial years of 1886 and 1906 which may have curtailed these problems.⁶³¹ The damage to the Corps, at least in the near term, was done. Only one batch of officers completed a full course, as owing to the First World War from 1914 to 1918, all training had to be suspended or modified and the Corps entered the war short of over forty officers.⁶³²

In later years, Hankey was modest as to what extent his ideas may have influenced the course of British decisions in the planning and phases of the First World War. Arthur J. Marder, in his research for his multi-volume *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, contacted Hankey on his involvement. Hankey expressed concern to Marder about publication of letters relating to 1911 discussions of sending expeditionary forces to France: "There was a wide difference of opinion between the Admiralty and the War Office, and within the Cabinet itself, on whether or not, if we were drawn into a war, the Expeditionary Force should be sent to France".⁶³³ In fact, by November 1911 Hankey had already penned his thoughts on the sending of the BEF to France at the start of hostilities, which he believed would be anything but rapid or useful in stemming an attack from Germany. Hankey argued against sending the BEF to France, "unless the British

⁶²⁸ CCA, FISR 1/5 (234/48), Fisher Papers, memorandum dated 18 February 1907.

⁶²⁹ CCA, FISR 1/5 (234/48).

⁶³⁰ Blumberg, *History of the Royal Marines*, 124.

⁶³¹ Don Bittner, *A Ghost of a General and the R.M Officer Corps of 1914*, Royal Marines Historical Society, Special Publication no. 6, (Portsmouth, 1994), 20.

⁶³² Blumberg, *History of the Royal Marines*, 124.

⁶³³ HNKY 5/3 -31, Hankey to Marder, 5 March 1954.

Expeditionary Force can be placed at the right place and at the right time it will not be of much value.”⁶³⁴ Hankey cited the realities of the Germans having 84 divisions and the French 66 to oppose them; the BEF with a mere six divisions would be a token force.⁶³⁵ The Royal Marines, however, would in fact take part in an early expeditionary role to Belgium, one which the Corps was not prepared for but was led nevertheless by Hankey’s early mentor, George Grey Aston. This will be detailed in the next and last chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the Royal Marines were neither the stewards nor successful innovators behind anything resembling a doctrine for amphibious warfare in the nineteenth century. While some historians have used historical examples of Marines participating in campaigns where amphibious operations were featured to illustrate their mastery or prowess of the subject, the evidence shows exactly the opposite: the Marines could neither influence the development of such a doctrine independently, nor did the will to do so truly manifest itself. Obstructions to this were grounded in the stark realities in part with fiscal constraints imposed on the Admiralty, but also the dominant navalist preference for fleets and ships to maintain parity with would be antagonists. Without any members of influence in the Admiralty ranks, calls for real innovation and changes in their operational role remained unadopted.

Early ideas for changes, such as those from Schomberg, offered no real departure from traditional roles by either seeking to maintain a balance or improvement to a status quo, what was needed was a mission which could make the Corps distinguishable. They did provoke the further debate as to whether the Royal Marines were still necessary. Aston understood a need for better cooperation between the services and that this meant further understanding and study of amphibious warfare. His ideas however to did not carry the conviction or the vision for real change, advocating instead a need to “think amphibiously” and imploring the services to seek mutual empathy and understanding. Hankey was perhaps more of a visionary who saw a different future for the Corps in littoral warfare and strike, but controversially felt the Corps could be sacrificed by the navy if it was necessary to maintain and develop the capability. His ideas, and those of Aston’s were not implemented and the first reason was that the navy was still preoccupied with the business of manning, modernisation, and building ships for what was expected to be another great conflict. New ideas, especially concerning another use for the Marines was not a priority. A second reason specific to Hankey’s own ideas on the training and integration of marines, and particularly officers, were so strong that they divided opinions in the Corps and navy alike as shown in the Douglas Committee minutes. One of these

⁶³⁴ HNKY 7/ 3-5, “Appendix III - The Case against sending the Expeditionary Force to France”, 3.

⁶³⁵ HNKY 7/ 3-5, 3.

officers was none other than George Aston, and each took opposing views over a reform scheme which struck to the heart of both the existence and identity of the Royal Marines.

These were not missed opportunities as these were not ever presented as such. The ideas might have provoked serious questions, but no real actions were taken. No real consideration of these ideas ever took place in the Corps, it was still far too parochial an institution and did not have the flexibility of an independent organisation free to trial new ideas; it was firmly under the thumb of the Royal Navy. The First World War would shatter this. It would be up to the officers who experienced it to find new ways to better utilise the Corps. The concluding chapter which follows reveals how this was not to be the case.

Chapter 6. Towards an uncertain amphibious future, 1914-1927

The institutional expertise the United Kingdom possesses in amphibious warfare has been hard won, and continues to be maintained today in UK Armed Forces by a group of specialists, mainly found in the Royal Marines and in the Royal Navy's amphibious fleet. Dispensing with a unique cadre of military expertise from across the three Services, or reducing it to the level where it cannot be deployed on a strategically meaningful scale, would be an irreparable act of folly. – Quoted from “Sunset for the Royal Marines?”, HC Defence Committee, HC 622, 4 February 2018⁶³⁶

Contemporary British expertise in amphibious warfare is extensive and has been shaped by long experience. Built over many centuries, it is the product of an island nation and leading naval power whose geographical and geopolitical realities, inspired a foreign policy of global expansion and the need to defend its colonial possessions and interests by deploying its forces from the sea. The history of British amphibious warfare also demonstrates its dangers and complexities. For every success, there have been serious reverses illustrating the unique risks associated with amphibious operations. Richard Harding reminds us that assault landings in the face of an entrenched or alerted enemy, common to the twentieth century, were dangerous and rare. The increased popularity of amphibious landing in the eighteenth century grew from the successes and failures of General Wolfe at Louisbourg in 1758 and his capture of Quebec in 1759, the latter seeing his death on the Plains of Abraham.⁶³⁷ Colin White reminds us that the injuries suffered by Lord Nelson to his right eye and right arm occurred not in sea battles but in amphibious operations, with the latter injury occurring during the failed assault on Spanish held Santa Cruz de Tenerife in 1797 during the French Revolutionary Wars.⁶³⁸ In this period, amphibious operations between the army and the navy were understood largely in the context of the movement of forces to and from ships to designated landing places which were almost always unopposed by the enemy. By the twentieth century, as weaponry evolved, anti-access and area denial devices such as sea mines and longer ranged shore gun batteries provided defending forces with improved methods to oppose landings. Reflecting on this, the question then as it pertains to this study is what role did the Royal Marines have in the practice of amphibious warfare and was this compatible with their culture and identity? If today the Royal Marines are recognised as amphibious experts, was this opportunity developed by them or was it thrust upon them? This chapter argues it did not occur in the early twentieth century.

⁶³⁶ “Sunset for the Royal Marines?”, HC Defence Committee, HC 622, 4 February 2018, 12. Accessed from: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmdfence/622/622.pdf>.

⁶³⁷ Richard Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare, 1650-1830*, (London: UCL Press, Ltd, 1999) 212.

⁶³⁸ Colin White, “Nelson Ashore, 1780-97”, in *Seapower Ashore: 200 Years of Royal Navy Operations on Land*, edited by Peter Hore (London: Chatham Publishing, 2001), 53-54.

Britt Zerbe has argued that by the conclusion of the eighteenth century the Marines served as an important link between the army and the navy, “because of the amphibious nature of the Marines, they could provide the ever increasingly important operational bridge for these two organisations upon sea and land”.⁶³⁹ Evidence presented later here will show this was not the case. Not only did the Royal Marines not endorse this statement, but would also later definitively conclude that their role was not to serve as a link or bridge between the services. Further to this counter argument, Allan Millett has argued that amphibious warfare development in Britain lacked both the organisational commitment of the services or “tangible institutional memory” with which the Royal Marines might have assisted with both.⁶⁴⁰ The Marines failed, Millett argues, to seize the opportunity to champion amphibious operations in the post-war period, or significantly influence the discussion of combined operations in a tangible way. As will be shown, the traumatic events of a forced amalgamation and coming to terms with a new Corps identity proved a more urgent necessity, an unfortunate distraction to the equally pressing matter of defining their role in a period of fiscal austerity. The First World War and the lessons derived were a battlefield on which many grappled over the legacy and memory, and still today. In particular, historians have sought to correct the idea that Britain discarded amphibious doctrine in the interwar period. Ian Speller, who has written extensively on amphibious warfare and British defence in the twentieth century, expanded further on Millett’s argument. Speller has suggested that following the First World War the Royal Marines were left in a state of further ambiguity about their role and mission. Speller argues that the concentration on the inter-service nature of amphibious warfare, and the continued demand by the Admiralty for employment of Marines in conventional military duties ashore, denied them the opportunity to develop a distinct role. This, states Speller, fundamentally threatened the Marines with further reduction of expenditure, amalgamation with the Army, or complete disbandment.⁶⁴¹

The first part of this chapter will examine the early failed deployments of the Marine Brigade, the experience of the Corps within the Naval Division, and other key events which inspired new thinking. The Corps found itself conflictingly subordinated throughout the war under both the army and the navy, and saw the record of their deeds mostly obfuscated and subsumed in the narratives of the grand campaigns and battles. It will be argued these factors further complicated the Corp’s post-war status. Examined next in this chapter is the uncertain footing the Corps found itself on following the First World War. These will be examined in two post-war events, firstly a forced amalgamation of its components which disrupted Corps identity. Secondly, what was to be the last serious

⁶³⁹ Zerbe, *The Birth of the Royal Marines*, 207.

⁶⁴⁰ Allan R. Millett, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, edited by Williamson R. Murray, Allan R. Millett, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 61.

⁶⁴¹ Ian Speller, *The Role of Amphibious Warfare in British Defence Policy, 1945-1956*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 75.

opportunity to innovate change to the existing structure and mission of the Corps in the interwar period before a radical transformation was to take place. This transformation during the Second World War would mark the Corps organisational transformation to the Commandos which was to change the identity of the Corps.

The role of the Royal Marines in the First World War has been largely overlooked or subsumed in grander narratives of campaigns, both in the early years and by more recent historians. Paul M. Kennedy's analysis of Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* was the first review of Britain's depreciating role as both a naval and imperial power.⁶⁴² Kennedy accurately characterised the era of shipbuilding in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the end of inexpensive shipbuilding, which would test the limits of Britain's economy, ultimately ceding to the industrial land empires of the United States and Russia.⁶⁴³ Specific to the concerns of this chapter, Kennedy accurately portrayed the First World War as an inter-service dispute between the British Admiralty and the War Office for status as the guarantor of victory. The failure of the 1915 Dardanelles campaign, Kennedy stated, would reinforce views of those insisting that any diversion of troops from the Western Front weakened the Allied war effort.⁶⁴⁴ The Royal Marines would fight on both these fronts.

While the Royal Marines may have been left gasping for life after the war, it is inaccurate to say the British defence community was left paralyzed from the experience of the First World War. As Kenneth Clifford has stated, "many British writers after WWII simply summed up the interwar period and combined operations development to the effect that little was accomplished," an assumption that little was being done about amphibious doctrine, "to say nothing was done is not accurate".⁶⁴⁵ Britain was not, as some have claimed, scarred by disasters like Galipolli. Serious development of landing crafts occurred in this period. Efforts to establish harmony over amphibious operations through a codified doctrine was also attempted. Richard Harding has mapped the extensive amount of work done by both the army and the navy in reconciling their operational relationships over a series of military exercises, efforts to establish joint doctrine, and investment in amphibious vehicle platforms throughout the 1920s, immediately following the war.⁶⁴⁶ Harding has shown that there was much more reflection on what was learned rather than neglect, though enthusiasm was hampered by the reality of fiscal austerity. Britain would need to wait until the 1930s and the threat of another great conflict, and was arguably still poorly prepared.⁶⁴⁷ Matthew Heaslip can be included among those historians more

⁶⁴² Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, (Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press, Ltd. 1983)

⁶⁴³ Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, 333-334.

⁶⁴⁴ Kennedy, 256-257.

⁶⁴⁵ Kenneth J. Clifford, *Amphibious warfare development in Britain and America from 1920-1940*, (Laurens, N.Y.: Edgewood, 1983) vii.

⁶⁴⁶ Richard Harding, "Learning From The War: Development of British Amphibious Capability, 1919-1929", *The Mariner's Mirror*, vol. 86, no.2, (May 2000), 173-185.

⁶⁴⁷ Harding, "Learning From The War", 184.

recently working to dispel the myth of the “Gallipoli Curse”.⁶⁴⁸ Heaslip argues that rather than fearing the ghosts of the recent past, Britain analysed its lessons and embarked on a series of exercises which matched in magnitude those of the US Marine Corps who were busy testing their concept of Fleet Landing Exercises in the Americas.⁶⁴⁹ These lessons, however, did little to influence the composition or the structure of the Royal Marines, and did not result in their being designated as Britain’s preferred amphibious force.

The Royal Marines in the First World War – complete sublimation, near annihilation

Writing years later, the Corps historian Cyril Field would reflect bitterly on the complicated marine legacy of participation as part of the Naval Division:

In the recent Great War – in which, by the way, the heroic deeds of the Royal Marines eclipsed anything I have been able to record in this work – whole battalions of them were somewhat lost to sight by being embodied in a so called “Naval Brigade”, the other battalions of which, far from being composed of seamen belonging to the Navy proper, were made up of men who, for the most part, excellent *soldiers* as they proved had never set foot upon the deck of a man-of-war. Such overshadowing is not conducive to the fostering of *esprit de corps*, for it is the history and traditions of past glories which inspire that feeling, so invaluable to a Regiment, so great a support in the hour of peril, so animating in the crisis of battle, which adds to the soldier’s zeal for personal distinction the nobler aim of increasing the laurels of his Corps.⁶⁵⁰

The experience of the Royal Marines in the First World War was one of significant involvement, but as will be shown the years following the war reflected missed opportunities. The failures to anticipate these opportunities, as well as the planning decisions prior to and the early phases of the war, were widely critiqued in its aftermath. “Worse than all,” stated George Aston in a 1926 paper encouraging reform of the Committee of Imperial Defence, “there was no properly considered and co-ordinated plan for using our mobile sea and land forces in the event of war with any specified enemy.”⁶⁵¹ British military planners in this period were otherwise preoccupied with the expectation of a continental war in Europe, most likely with Germany. Yet war on the continent was viewed by the Royal Navy as primarily the army’s problem; fleet modernisation took priority. At the outbreak of the First World War, according to plan the British Expeditionary Force or B.E.F., consisting of four infantry divisions and a cavalry division were dispatched to France in August 1914. By late August, two more infantry divisions joined

⁶⁴⁸ Matthew Heaslip, “Britain’s armed forces and amphibious operations in peace and war, 1919-1939: A Gallipoli Curse?”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*. (January 2019) pp.1-23.

⁶⁴⁹ Heaslip, “Britain’s Armed Forces”, 13.

⁶⁵⁰ Italics by author in Field, *Sea Soldiers*, Vol. 1, i.

⁶⁵¹ Major-General Sir George Aston K.C.B., “The Committee of Imperial Defence”, *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, 71:483, (1926) 458.

them but by this time the BEF had retreated from Mons to the east of Paris where it took part in the Battle of the Marne. Since Britain had now committed itself to a land war, it was vastly undermanned and resourced and needed troops fast. Two solutions were quickly proposed by the Admiralty: mobilisation of the Naval Division, and more urgently, the deployment for the first time of a Marine Brigade

The Naval Division

While recovering in hospital at Plymouth from a bout of enteric fever, Major Jerram learned in December 1914 that he had been assigned to the Naval Division as a Staff Captain of the Marine Brigade.⁶⁵² Jerram, who would later serve at Gallipoli and later in France with the Marine Brigade of the Division, recorded his impressions of Churchill's creation as, "a good idea in itself if it had been carried to a logical conclusion."⁶⁵³ As First Sea Lord, Churchill formed the Royal Naval Division on the 18th of August 1914, nearly a week after Britain entered the war, with an order from the Admiralty which began with a naval brigade which would consist of seamen from the reserves of the Royal Navy.⁶⁵⁴ This original formation would expand to a Naval Division, consisting of three brigades, two of naval reservists and the third of Royal Marines. Each brigade was to consist of four battalions of 1,000 men each.⁶⁵⁵ Made up primarily of sailors and Naval Reservists not assigned to ships of the fleet, many resented the idea of being turned into soldiers. The Naval Division was made up of two brigades of sailors and one of Marines. The sailors of the naval brigades consisted primarily of unemployed stokers, free on account of the latest ships being oil fired.⁶⁵⁶ Officering the brigades was an assortment of navy and marine officers, including officers who as Jerram recalled, "were largely Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, who hated it and wanted to serve at sea."⁶⁵⁷ Despite designation for service on land as soldiers, naval traditions were kept in naming the battalions of the brigades of sailors after famous admirals: Drake, Nelson, Anson, Collingwood, Benbow, Hawke, Howe, and Hood. The Marine Brigade named their battalions for their parent Divisions at Plymouth, Portsmouth, Chatham, and the training depot at Deal.

This development coincided with an Admiralty paper exploring the historical employment of the naval brigades, concluded that, "The practice has always been to use them only in combined expeditions – that is when Fleet and Army remain in tactical touch"⁶⁵⁸

Exceptions were cited were the "sudden call in distant parts of the Empire when troops are not available" which, the paper claimed, also included the Indian Mutiny and South

⁶⁵² Charles Frederick Jerram, *A Soldier Gone to Sea: Memoir of a Royal Marine in Both World Wars*, edited by Donald F. Bittner, (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2016), 81.

⁶⁵³ Jerram, *A Soldier Gone to Sea*, 82.

⁶⁵⁴ ADM 1/8391/267, "Formation of Naval Brigade – Deal".

⁶⁵⁵ ADM 1/8391/267.

⁶⁵⁶ Jerram, *A Soldier Gone to Sea*, 82.

⁶⁵⁷ Jerram, 82-83.

⁶⁵⁸ ADM 1/8391/278, "Naval brigade - employment of naval brigades during operations – 1914".

Africa, where the latter case was most notably in the Methuen expedition.⁶⁵⁹ The paper cited that the first employment of naval brigades in the Crimean War, were “merely extensions of traditional practice by which seamen [&c.] assisted troops ashore in sieges of maritime towns that were the combined objective.”⁶⁶⁰ The paper also cited two concrete instances where the ambiguous command relationship of a naval party ashore, working with the army, created problems.

The first cited instance was in 1801 at Aboukir where sailors and marines were landed to aid in the guarding and maintaining the supply lines for General Abercromby’s expeditionary force in its bid to expel Napoleon from Egypt. Friction between the army and the navy emerged when news that a French squadron from Brest had entered the Mediterranean, requiring Lord Keith, Commander in Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, to recall his men to meet the enemy. Abercromby protested, citing that the recall of the sailors and marines would endanger his operations on land. Writing to Keith, Abercromby expressed his dissatisfaction in the strongest of terms, stating: “I shall consider your withdrawing as a dereliction of public service”, and demanded that since the two services were now so closely linked together in their bid success, only the strongest of assurances that the recall of the marines and sailors to counteract the French squadron were necessary.⁶⁶¹ Ultimately, Keith relented rather than provoke further problems between the two services.

The second cited a more recent incident in 1904 in the opening days of the Russo-Japanese War at Port Arthur where the Royal Navy had a presence in this Russian held portion of Manchuria. Here, crew members and ships’ guns from the fleet were lent to the army to defend a land front as hostilities between Russia and Japan developed. When the fleet commander asked for the ships’ crew and guns back, “the army openly and with much bitterness accused the Navy of wanting to run away and desert them.”⁶⁶² It was described further that “a very bad feeling was engendered between the services and it is said that the taunts of the army were one of the main causes of the squadron’s continued inactivity.”⁶⁶³ Within the continuous state of service rivalry, the ambiguous command relationship gave way to inter-service enmity. The paper in summary stated that “in principle and practice Naval Brigades are intended for combined operations only.”⁶⁶⁴ Reinforcing the ad-hoc nature of the employment of the naval brigades, the paper emphasised that “if used as a purely military unit while the enemy’s fleet is still potent, experience shows that at a time of crisis the effect is likely to be a serious disturbance of

⁶⁵⁹ ADM 1/8391/278, “Naval brigade - employment of naval brigades during operations – 1914”.

⁶⁶⁰ ADM 1/8391/278.

⁶⁶¹ ADM 1/8391/278.

⁶⁶² ADM 1/8391/278.

⁶⁶³ ADM 1/8391/278.

⁶⁶⁴ ADM 1/8391/278.

either the military of the naval plans and possibly of both.”⁶⁶⁵ The Royal Navy strategy instead emphasised delivering a decisive naval engagement and blockading. There was no thought to reconciling the cooperation of land and naval forces, or how the navy might create or and exploit of landing a force from the sea. The Royal Navy could neither conceal the fact that at the start of the war it held massive reserves of manpower and created an infantry force called the Naval Division, much to the frustration of the army which was scrambling to deploy men to France and beyond.

Early debacles – Belgium 1914

Days before the start of the war, on 2 August 1914 orders came to the Royal Marines Headquarters directing two battalions of three companies each from Eastney and Chatham, to form and draw stores and equipment for rapid mobilisation. Once formed, two further battalions, one each from the Divisions at Portsmouth and Plymouth, would join them. It was made clear that these were not to interfere with the current requirements for manning of the Fleet, but “the work on which these Battalions will be employed will be similar to that performed at Scapa Flow in 1912”.⁶⁶⁶ Such a contingency and deployment had in fact originally been designed for a possible defence of the Orkneys per previous Admiralty instructions rather than operations on the continent.⁶⁶⁷ Surviving correspondence shows the extent of the chaotic preparations, and the fact that neither a staff, personnel, proper equipment, or any planned rehearsals of such a contingency existed or had taken place.⁶⁶⁸ With so many other units around the country rapidly mobilising, it became clear by 4 August that original assumptions about any support from the War Department being able to supply the Royal Marines with essential military equipment was not possible, and that the new formations would need to assess availability of supplies from the dockyards. Furthermore, the necessary manpower requirements for officers and men necessitated a wider look to the Portsmouth and Plymouth Divisions and the depot at Deal.⁶⁶⁹ Even so, the battalions were successfully organised on short notice and arrangements were made to the extent that the Adjutant General of the Corps, William Nichols, was able to report on 6 August to the Admiralty on the formation of the new Special Service Brigade. The first two battalions were prepared and had been detached for service at Scapa Flow while the remaining two battalions were awaiting further instructions. The report first stated that the battalions were “ready for service”, but that “very little time to organise and train them as a complete unit”, had been

⁶⁶⁵ ADM 1/8391/278, “Naval brigade - employment of naval brigades during operations – 1914”.

⁶⁶⁶ ADM 201/16, Royal Marine Special Service Brigade Formation, 1914.

⁶⁶⁷ CHAR 13/22B/286-287, Minute by Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, on the employment of the Royal Marines, particularly their use in manning east coast defences. Churchill also suggested the creation of a mobile brigade of Marines which could be sent to protect the Orkneys or any other minor detached overseas service. Just prior to the outbreak of war, Churchill had carefully considered the allocation and disposition of the Royal Marines around the fleet and at home. 800 marines, he determined, might be utilised as a ‘mobile brigade’ for rapid deployment to the Orkneys. This was the brigade which to be suddenly mobilised to the continent under Aston.

⁶⁶⁸ ADM 201/16.

⁶⁶⁹ ADM 201/16.

available, and certain items of equipment, such as khaki uniforms, still were not available.⁶⁷⁰ The report also queried “the probable nature of their employment” might be made available so that further training could be conducted with more efficiency. The reply from the Admiralty indicated that the Brigade was “to be trained as a Brigade of regular Infantry available for immediate service in the Field at home or on the Continent”.⁶⁷¹ The minimum acceptable size for this force was to be 3000 men. A large enough suitable training space was identified near Portsmouth, only for the order that the brigade must be stood down on the 20 August.⁶⁷² Then, just as suddenly on 25 August, the Brigade was ordered to reform to be sent to the continent at Ostend under Brigadier General George Aston who learned he was to be in command that same evening.⁶⁷³

Given no staff of his own, Aston seconded officers to his staff from the available officers in his battalions. The short notice and lack of information as to where the brigade was headed and to what purpose, added to the confusion and subsequently the brigade packed all they could from their available stores.⁶⁷⁴ Despite these challenges, the brigade arrived in intervals in Ostend in the early hours of the 27th. A young Captain Frederick Jerram, who would later serve at Gallipoli and the Western Front with distinction, recalled transporting elements of the Marine Brigade to Ostend while serving as the marine detachment commander on HMS *Euryalus*. Aston, who was badly in need of staff officers, begged the Admiral the release of Jerram but was denied as he was the ship’s only Marine officer. Jerram later recalled his disappointment of missing out on this early venture, but consoled himself by transcribing essential maps and documents during the voyage to lend Aston’s staff some assistance.⁶⁷⁵ Orders were to maintain a small pocket and perimeter defence at Ostend, in order that they might be easily supplied. The marines initially worked in their standard blue uniforms; khaki uniforms eventually caught up with them. Facing what was one of Europe’s field armies at that time, the marines faced a greater problem than uniforms. No artillery was landed, requiring the marines to rely on heliograph and signal flags to communicate with naval guns offshore, who themselves were more anxious of German submarines patrolling the area.⁶⁷⁶ In part over concerns of the safety of the fleet, and the fact the Brigade was for the moment unemployed, the Admiralty decided that after just four days, the Marine Brigade was to return to England on the 31st.

⁶⁷⁰ ADM 201/16, “Naval brigade - employment of naval brigades during operations – 1914”.

⁶⁷¹ ADM 201/16.

⁶⁷² Blumberg, *Britain’s Sea Soldiers – A Record of the Royal Marines During the War 1914-1919*, (Devonport: Swiss, 1927) 98.

⁶⁷³ CHAR 13/36/80, Minute from Winston Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty to the Secretary of the Admiralty, Sir William Graham Greene, with orders for Colonel Sir George Aston, Royal Marine Brigade, ordering him to occupy and fortify Ostend, Belgium, to create a diversion favourable to the Belgians advancing from Antwerp, and to threaten the western flank of the German southward advance; also giving him the temporary rank of Brigadier-General.

⁶⁷⁴ Blumberg, *Britain’s Sea Soldiers*, 98.

⁶⁷⁵ Bittner, *Soldier Gone to Sea*, 81.

⁶⁷⁶ Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 65.

By mid-September, the ongoing crisis of the rapid German advance on Paris was at stake in the Battle of the Marne. The Marine Brigade was called on again to deploy, this time to Dunkirk on 18 September. By this time the lessons around organising a brigade size force on short notice had been suitably exercised; it was now also known as the Third Brigade of the Royal Naval Division.⁶⁷⁷ The brigade was now located at Walmer which was to be a principal training location for the new Royal Naval Division. The battalion formed from Eastney, made up of artillery marines, was exchanged for another battalion from the other Divisions – the battalions now available represented and were named for Chatham, Portsmouth, Plymouth, and Deal.⁶⁷⁸ The orders to occupy Dunkirk, on the extreme left of the Allies, was designed to convince the Germans that they were an Advance Guard of a much larger force.

In Belgium, matters for the Belgian army were rapidly disintegrating with the advancing Germans and urgent attention was needed for a hastily improvised defence. Churchill himself arrived in Antwerp, via Dunkirk to inspect the Marine Brigade as First Lord of the Admiralty. Here, Churchill found Aston in a severe state of mental and physical stress, and relieved him in the field, replacing him with an RMA Colonel, Archibald Paris, who would later command the Naval Division on the Western Front.⁶⁷⁹ Paris in turn would be replaced by Colonel Alfred Marchant of Graspan fame.⁶⁸⁰ On 3 October, the Marine Brigade advanced to Antwerp. Here, the Marines integrated themselves into a defensive perimeter and held off the German attacks. Antwerp would serve as the rally point for the defeated Belgian Army until 10 October when the Belgian army retreated into France; the marines were able to retire to England to regroup on the 12th.⁶⁸¹ Ultimately, Antwerp was held long enough to serve the retreating Belgian army from becoming a complete rout, but with losses of marines killed and captured.⁶⁸²

An important lesson, or opportunity lost, in the landing of the Marines was the failure for planners and the Cabinet to make efforts to synchronise and coordinate operations from the sea and on land. Had army divisions followed up the Marines landing, rather than withdrawing the marines as hastily as they had been inserted, opportunities to further disrupt and force a German retreat might have emerged. The outcome at Antwerp sharpened condemnation for Churchill and the Admiralty's handling of the war, while Churchill cited it a success in delaying the German advance. The German fleet did not emerge for a grand confrontation and German submarine raids increased. This first venture of the Marine Brigade and the Naval Division on land ended in relative embarrassment and failure. While no special blame might have been placed on the

⁶⁷⁷ Blumberg, *Britain's Sea Soldiers* 100.

⁶⁷⁸ Blumberg, 100.

⁶⁷⁹ Blumberg, 103.

⁶⁸⁰ Blumberg, 107.

⁶⁸¹ Blumberg, 110

⁶⁸² Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 71.

Marines, the event draws attention to the fact that their utility and usage were undervalued and demonstrably not organised to any degree of efficiency.

The experiences of these early deployments brought home important lessons. In this short period, Aston found coordination with his supporting naval force exceedingly difficult as they were preoccupied with the German naval threat. This short and abortive operation was followed, three weeks later, by the larger deployment of British Forces to Dunkirk. Little improvement had been made in his force's preparedness or mobility, and this time their task was complicated by the need to cooperate with both the French and the British Expeditionary Force. To make things worse, operational coordination between the Army and Navy was conducted at Cabinet level between Field Marshal Lord Kitchener and Churchill, with the latter then giving direct orders to Aston.⁶⁸³ By now, the two short expeditions demonstrated the difficulty of improvising an amphibious operation on such short notice as well as the challenges of inter-service cooperation; lessons which would be highlighted again at Gallipoli. While Aston was not responsible for them, the failings at Gallipoli would reinforce and demonstrate the weakness of the views that good relations alone between commanders would not suffice. These views had not, under such a high tempo and short-lived deployment to Belgium, worked well for Aston under his own circumstances.

The "gradual pressure of sea power"

In a January 1915 memorandum to the Cabinet, Fisher cited the problem as he saw it, one which plagued the British planning of the war from its early days: "At recent meetings of the War Council projects have been discussed for joint naval and military operations against place on the coast as well as for similar operations by the Navy alone. Up to present, however, no clear statement has been made at the War Council as to what our naval policy in this war is to be."⁶⁸⁴ Fisher continued, stating, "Our naval policy must be regulated by that of the enemy", and cited the "policy of Germany to avoid a decision at sea and to keep the command in dispute as long as possible while they concentrate their offensive powers on the army ashore."⁶⁸⁵ Fisher summed up the present state of affairs as similar to those encountered by Britain in the past, such as the Napoleonic Wars, where Britain faced a strong belligerent on land which was forced to take the defensive option at sea due Britain's strong navy. The "gradual pressure of sea power", Fisher believed, would force desperate manoeuvres at sea by the enemy.⁶⁸⁶ Fisher believed Germany's navy had chosen the defensive option, leaving Britain in command of the seas, and stated, "We play into Germany's hands if we risk fighting ships in any subsidiary

⁶⁸³ Beach, "The British Army", 165-166.

⁶⁸⁴ CAB 42/1/24, "Memorandum by the First Sea Lord on the Position of the British Fleet and its Policy of Steady Pressure", 1.

⁶⁸⁵ CAB 42/1/24, 1.

⁶⁸⁶ CAB 63/1, 17.

operations such as coastal bombardments or the attack of fortified place without military co-operation.”⁶⁸⁷ On this important matter of naval and military coordination, Fisher was more pessimistic:

It has been said that the first function of the British army is to assist the fleet in obtaining command of the sea. This might be accomplished by military co-operation with the Navy in such operations as the attack of Zeebrugge or the forcing of the Dardanelles, which might bring out the German and Turkish fleets, respectively. Apparently, however, this is not to be. The British army is apparently to continue to provide a small sector of the allied front in France, where it no more helps the Navy than if it were at Timbuctoo.⁶⁸⁸

Previous employment of the Royal Marines in Belgium supported this statement, but the further lack of coordination at Gallipoli would be the most infamous example of this failure to better sync the efforts of Britain’s armed forces. In 1916, Jutland would prove the imperfect large scale naval battle the Royal Navy had longed for, in which the Royal Marines would not only serve but gain some distinction from the actions of Major Harvey in saving HMS *Lion*, Beatty’s flagship, from complete destruction.⁶⁸⁹ Otherwise, the Royal Navy remained employed in protecting naval convoys, blockading, or otherwise deterring the German navy from further sea actions. Besides Gallipoli, the Marines would serve with the Royal Naval Division also in France in many more campaigns which hardly captured the public’s attention. In France, the efforts of the Naval Division, and consequently the marines, were subsumed within the wider events of the protracted deadlock on the lines. This point was not lost on one naval officer of the Naval Division, who stated: “Before the war reputations went by regiments, but in a war of this magnitude the regiment has merged in the brigade and the brigade in the division. The division is the unit which creates a reputation for itself nowadays, and the divisional esprit de corps is most marked.”⁶⁹⁰ This fact was not lost on the new First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir Eric Geddes, who frequently fielded demands from the army to deliver marines to reinforce the army’s battalions on the front and to likewise surrender other navy men to be turned into soldiers.⁶⁹¹ Geddes was forced then to justify in detail the contributions of the navy to the war effort, and how thinning naval ranks in one area ultimately eroded continued success in another, notwithstanding undermining the efforts on land. Late in the war, Geddes sought to better justify the employment of marines in the fleet. According to Geddes the navy was still anticipating another opportunity for a major fleet action, and was determined

⁶⁸⁷ CAB 42/1/24, “Memorandum by the First Sea Lord on the Position of the British Fleet and its Policy of Steady Pressure”, 2.

⁶⁸⁸ CAB 63/1, “Memorandum by the First Sea Lord on the Position of the British Fleet and its Policy of Steady Pressure”, 19. Field, *Sea Soldiers*, Foreword written by Admiral Beatty; Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 131-132.

⁶⁹⁰ Anonymous, “Some Impressions of the Western Front”, *Naval Review*, 106, no.4, (November 2018) 395.

⁶⁹¹ CAB 24/26/7, “Royal Marines from the Navy”, 31 March 1918, 257.

not to compromise the fleet and its manning.⁶⁹² As noted by Richard Harding, navies and sea power operate invisibly for most of the time, their utility and presence easily forgotten by the public.⁶⁹³ This belief had in part motivated the actions of the naval brigade in the South African War and now the First World War, and partly inspired the ambitious raid at Zeebrugge on the 23rd of April, St George's Day, 1918.

Zeebrugge – the first Marine Commando of the twentieth century

The outcome and impact of the raids continues to be debated as to their operational and strategic impact to this day, and one which again will be argued here as a missed opportunity which nonetheless retained an important legacy. The irony was perhaps not lost on the Marines, who had landed in Zeebrugge and Ostend in 1914 only to withdraw to the Germans advance, that they would now be launching a raid against this hub of German submarine operations in 1918. The Zeebrugge raid was planned and executed under the supervision of Admiral Roger Keyes. The stated purpose was to block the approaches of the canal for the deployment of German submarines, but also as a demonstration that the navy was still very much in the war effort. In the summary of action published by the Admiralty following the Zeebrugge raid, it was noted that:

This formidable system has been greatly strengthened and improved since the German occupation in 1914, and has recently provided a base for at least 35 enemy torpedo craft and about 30 submarines. By reason of its position and comparative security it has constituted a continual and ever-increasing menace to the sea communications of our Army and to the seaborne trade and food supplies of the United Kingdom.⁶⁹⁴

As noted by Julian Thompson, the raid at Zeebrugge was a hugely complicated and ambitious scheme with little margin for error.⁶⁹⁵ After a fortnight's training, the assault force of sailors and marines reflected the general composition of naval forces for land use of the war to date. In execution, the raid might have resembled the expeditions of previous centuries, even those of the landing parties of the nineteenth century. But what might have been suitable for command and control purposes in the nineteenth century, was now increasingly more complex on modern battlefields. Machine guns and shore batteries were also a more formidable challenge. The plan called for an assault on the canal entrance used by the German U-Boats, which included the scuttling of ships as an obstacle. News of the event was sensational and exploited to maximum effect.⁶⁹⁶ Results were mixed, the raid force suffered over 500 casualties and several captured, while the

⁶⁹² 24/46/97, "Royal Marines from the Navy", Admiralty Memorandum for the War Cabinet, 31 March 1918.

⁶⁹³ Richard Harding, *Modern Naval History Debates*, 132.

⁶⁹⁴ 137/3894, "Zeebrugge and Ostend Operations, April and May 1918".

⁶⁹⁵ Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 169.

⁶⁹⁶ "Damage At The Raided Ports", *The Times*, Thursday, April 25, 1918, (London, England).

Germans suffered only a few casualties and claimed “torpedo boats passed in and out of Zeebrugge the next day as usual, and submarines the next”, the ships detailed to block the canal having failed to achieve their objective.⁶⁹⁷ Nothing, however, has diminished the courage of the sailors and marines who took part, and the Germans also acknowledged of the raid force that, “their plucky actions deserved all recognition.”⁶⁹⁸ Six Victoria Crosses were awarded to officers and sailors of the Royal Navy, and two were awarded to the Royal Marines through a most unusual method of the Victoria Cross ballot chosen by the marines themselves.⁶⁹⁹

Jackie Fisher stated in his memoirs in 1919, “no such folly was ever devised by fools as such an operation as that of Zeebrugge divorced from military co-operation on land.”⁷⁰⁰ This unflattering commentary by Fisher, was in context to his appraisal of operations on land conducted by the Royal Navy during the war, which included Gallipoli. Fisher was also known to be at odds with the key architect of the Zeebrugge raid, Keyes. Fisher, the architect of the revived surface navy, could not reconcile the creation and employment of the Royal Navy in a fighting role on land. Even the Germans acknowledged the audacity of the littoral strike, stating “there is no infallible means of defence against such attacks. The only surprising thing about the enterprise is that the enemy now for the first time made such an attack.”⁷⁰¹ The operation did serve to demonstrate to the British public that the Royal Navy was still very much involved in the war effort regardless of perception to the contrary. For these reasons, Zeebrugge has become strongly enmeshed in the contemporary narrative of the Corps as one of the first commando like operations of the Corps. Ironically, the 4th Battalion was disbanded so that no future unit in the Corps could be numbered as such, thus missing an opportunity for the maintenance of a useful organisational lineage.⁷⁰²

At war’s end: the Corps battle for survival begins

The Royal Naval Division, established at the outset of the war, was formally disbanded in 1919 in a ceremony at Horse Guards.⁷⁰³ As a non-land army force, the Naval Division had proved a distraction from the navy’s tradition sea service role, a fact underpinned by the reality that some forty percent of the navy’s entire wartime dead had occurred in service on land.⁷⁰⁴ The realities of modern warfare to those who would be infantrymen, did not

⁶⁹⁷ “Zeebrugge Raid”, *The Times*, Monday, 29 April, 1918 (London, England).

⁶⁹⁸ “Damage At The Raided Ports”, *The Times*, Thursday, 25 April 1918, (London, England).

⁶⁹⁹ These were to Capt Edward Bamford RMLI and Sgt Norman Finch RMA. See Matthew Grant Little, *The Royal Marines and the Victoria Cross*, (Southsea: Royal Marines Museum, 2002) 52-53.

⁷⁰⁰ Admiral of the Fleet Lord John A. Fisher, *Memories*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919) 50.

⁷⁰¹ “Damage At The Raided Ports”, *The Times*, Thursday, 25 April 1918, (London, England).

⁷⁰² Thompson, *The Royal Marines*, 178.

⁷⁰³ LtCdr Alex Manning RN, “Jack and Royal in the Trenches: The Royal Naval Division, 1914-1919”, *The Sheet Anchor*, XL, no. 2, (2016) 77.

⁷⁰⁴ Some 125,000 sailors had been trained for service in the Naval Division, who when deployed on the ground seldom numbered above 18,000. With some 43-44,000 sailors listed as killed in action for the entire war, the Division incurred some 11,379 killed and 30,892 wounded, a figure combined equating to approximately 1/3 total of deaths in their respective

discriminate against service branches. Following the First World War, the question was not whether or if Britain should ever again embark on amphibious operations, but what was the suitable force to execute such an operational eventuality or necessity. The Royal Marines were not organised for or designated by the Royal Navy as an amphibious landing force. The Ostend expedition signalled to those critical of the Corps, that when fielded as an ad-hoc Brigade, poor planning and command structure among other failures, had hindered the experiment. Since the navy did not seriously take on the study of amphibious warfare in this time, no essential planning could take place and Marines were not viewed as subject matter experts beyond their service on ships of the fleet or dockyard duties. The choice of the Royal Marines as the de facto stewards of amphibious knowledge was not therefore a foregone conclusion. Britain may not have been at the conclusion of the war among the preeminent innovators or proponents of amphibious doctrine despite its history, but now had the opportunity to build on these experiences and did so. First, they had to deal with a severe blow to their organisation.

Amalgamation – a critical blow to Royal Marine organisational culture

Prior to the First World War, previous committees of inquiry had raised the possibility of amalgamation of the two organisations within the Corps, the Light Infantry and Artillery. In 1877, a committee for the reorganisation of the Corps was formed and published conclusions in 1880.⁷⁰⁵ One of the stated aims of the committee was, “To prepare a scheme for the amalgamation of the Royal Marine Artillery with the Royal Marine Light Infantry.”⁷⁰⁶ The committee ultimately concluded on this instruction for enquiry that, “the Royal Marine Artillery shall not be amalgamated with the Royal Marine Light Infantry, but be continued as a distinct branch of the corps until – not being further recruited – it is reduced to such numbers as to be easily capable of extinction, renders it necessary.”⁷⁰⁷ Schomberg, had commented at length on the near preservation of the artillery within his wider consideration of the government’s considerations in the same period to make the Corps redundant: “The destruction of the Marine Artillery, the most highly trained branch of the force, was decided on three years ago; it was saved from its fate almost by accident”.⁷⁰⁸ The committee otherwise concerned itself more with the state of the corps present organisational structure and personnel needs, with particular attention to training and promotion opportunities. In 1906, the Douglas Committee had examined the effects of the Admiralty’s proposed Selborne Scheme on marine officers, had briefly raised the question of amalgamation, but did not offer any conclusions on the matter in their

operational theatres at Gallipoli and the Western Front. See, Manning, “Jack and Royal in the Trenches: The Royal Naval Division, 1914-1919”, 78.

⁷⁰⁵ ADM 201/29, “Royal Marines Reorganisation of 1880”.

⁷⁰⁶ ADM 201/29.

⁷⁰⁷ ADM 201/29.

⁷⁰⁸ Schomberg, “Shall We Retain the Marines?”, 797.

findings.⁷⁰⁹ The preoccupation over what the employment of the Corps might be in matters of imperial defence continued to be the subject of debate and serious discussion of amalgamation was postponed, but now a new century and new crises linked to fiscal concerns and organisational efficiency coincided with the conclusion of the First World War. Discussion of an eventual amalgamation or outright disposal of one portion of the marine organisation was now an earnest topic of discussion. The debates which followed only served to show just how grounded the Royal Marines were in their views as an organisation structured in the model of an army regiment, or regiments as they debated the fate of a merging of both the artillery and the infantry. No arguments which followed truly embraced the idea of an opportunity for real change or that the structure ought to best serve the very service which defined their justification for their continued service, the Royal Navy.

Since the conclusion of the war in 1919, the voted strength of the Corps had come down gradually from a war time high of 37,896 officers and men in 1919 to 13,742 in 1922. This was from a total of 18,585 at the start of hostilities in 1914.⁷¹⁰ All the services faced cuts to personnel and expenditures, as was a routine post-conflict practice, but the added spectre of amalgamation of the Corps artillery and infantry emerged once again. In March of 1923, *The Times* reported that while the Colonel-Commandant at Eastney had recently earned himself a promotion to major-general, no successor had been identified.⁷¹¹ Furthermore, rumours to the effect that one of the Portsmouth Division barracks, either Gosport or Eastney, might be forced to close and that the likely candidate of closure was Gosport, feeding speculation that one marine division might occupy Eastney. The article continued suggesting that RMLI marines were just as capable at employing field guns as their RMA peers, which was “an argument in favour of the proposed change.”⁷¹² With an air of pragmatism, the article closed stating that, “The total disappearance of the ‘blue’ Marines would naturally be received with keen regret, but in view of the many other branches and units of the Imperial Forces which have had to be sacrificed owing to the urgent need for public economy, such a change, if it came about, could hardly cause surprise.”⁷¹³ Faced with the need to enforce significant economies in the post-war environment, the Royal Marines could no longer dodge the issue of amalgamation.

In 1919, a committee was established, “to make definite proposals for amalgamating as far as possible the common Services of the Navy, Army and Air Force, such as Intelligence, Supply, Transport, Education, Medical, Chaplains, and any other overlapping

⁷⁰⁹ House of Commons, “Reports Departmental Committees Certain Questions Concerning The Extension Of The New Scheme Of Training For Officers Of The Navy, &C”, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1906) 101, 102.

⁷¹⁰ “Blue And Red Marines”, *The Times* (London, England), Thursday, 1 March 1923; 22.

⁷¹¹ “Blue And Red Marines”, 22.

⁷¹² “Blue And Red Marines”, 22.

⁷¹³ “Blue And Red Marines”, 22.

Departments, in order to reduce the cost of the present triplication.”⁷¹⁴ This committee, known as the Mond-Weir Committee, did not publish its findings until 1926, but its enquiries into the business of each service prompted, at least in part, the consideration for the amalgamation of the marine services. Instructions were passed down through the Admiralty that cuts, and economies must be made. The Royal Marines formed a special committee to consider the problem in May 1922, the minutes on the consideration of the show how the marines framed the problem from a perspective of cost savings in the abolition of one of the Divisions or the training depot at Deal.⁷¹⁵

The same minutes show the correspondence following the input from the various divisions of the Corps, which in turn revealed the internal friction over the decisions being considered. The General commanding the Portsmouth Division RMLI, Major General Armstrong, stated, “The title ‘Light Infantry’ is a highly esteemed distinction conferred by the Sovereign, whereas ‘artillery’ is merely a term describing an arm.” He continued, “I regret that I cannot see any justification for dropping a title of great honour because half of the Corps is being converted from Artillery to Infantry.” Armstrong believed, as did his peer in the Plymouth Division, that, “There are a good many Royal Regiments but at present we are one of six only which have the honour to bear the title Light Infantry as well, and I think it will be a thousand pities if we renounce that honour”.⁷¹⁶

Colonel Picton Phillips, the Commandant of the Royal Marines Artillery, voiced unpopular and in the opinion of many of his peers, poorly constructed arguments for the retention of both branches. Phillips stated, “It is a sheer physical impossibility for a soldier to be efficient as an Artilleryman and an Infantryman at the same time, the two sciences, involve two different types of brains, two different outlooks, and two life-times of study.” He concluded, “The alternative is to make the Corps a hybrid growth. Inefficient Infantryman, inefficient Gunners.”⁷¹⁷ In the memorandum published internally by the Chief of Staff, H.F. Oliver, it was agreed that, “Colonel Picton Phillip’s letter is the point of view of an Officer with a life’s experience of a small Corps and rather a narrow outlook”⁷¹⁸ But, it also acknowledged that it was “essential to review the functions of the Royal Marines and their place in the Naval Organisation.”⁷¹⁹ Further in the memorandum, the need for fixing on a fundamental mission for the Royal Marines in their new state was more urgent:

This necessity for a military force within the Naval organisation is fully recognised and is accentuated at the present time by the same arguments which render a Naval Air Branch imperative. This ideal would be to have a sufficient force of Infantry and

⁷¹⁴ “Report of the Committee on the Amalgamation of Services common to the Navy, Army and Air Force”, House of Commons, (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1926) 2.

⁷¹⁵ ADM 1/29279, RMA and RMLI, Amalgamation, Extract Board Minutes, 23 November 1922.

⁷¹⁶ ADM 1/29279.

⁷¹⁷ ADM 1/29279.

⁷¹⁸ ADM 1/29279.

⁷¹⁹ ADM 1/29279.

Artillery to draw upon, so that the Navy could, at will, employ a mixed Brigade to seize and fortify a base of purely Naval importance, or similar Service, without necessitating combined operation with the Army.⁷²⁰

Any decision or committee determining what the new mission might be would, however, be put on hold as the Royal Marines adapted to these changes to their organisation which now seemed inevitable. Other concerns regarding the proposed changes to uniforms, such as what colour tunic the men would now wear, were also considered in detail to the consternation of both the RMA and RMLI.⁷²¹ Overwhelmingly, the decisions favoured the adoption of a blue uniform in keeping with the Naval Service and a distinct departure from the army's red tunics. Collar and cap badges would retain the Globe and Laurel, shoulder titles would now display "R.M." in favour of "R.M.L.I" or "R.M.A."⁷²²

The MP for Battersea South, Viscount Curzon-Howe who was himself a naval officer, sought assurances that "the Royal Marine Artillery will not lose its identity in whatever proposals the Government are considering."⁷²³ The response was that with the merging of two Corps into one, the aim of the Admiralty was for neither to lose their identity. A follow-on question pried as to whether the once former RMA officers and marines would keep their uniform; the answer was "no".⁷²⁴ The First Lord of the Admiralty, Leo Amery, was questioned in the Commons on the proceedings towards cost savings to the Royal Navy, and their effects to the Royal Marines specifically. Detailed in *The Times*, Amery explained in Parliament that the reasons for amalgamation were fiscal in nature, with a target of saving of at least £50,000.⁷²⁵ Forton Barracks, the home of the Portsmouth Division, required extensive renovation at Admiralty expense and was scheduled to close and relocation of the division to Eastney. Marine recruits would also be trained at Deal at the training depot. Since Royal Marines were still expected to man specific gun turrets on ship, specialised training in artillery would remain at Eastney.⁷²⁶

Debate amongst former serving marine officers, as well as others interested in military matters, occurred in the side lines and was printed in the press with a range of opinions. George Aston who had commanded the RMA at the end of his career, offered his thoughts on the matter in a letter to the editor of *The Times*, which stated, "Both R.M.A. (as artillery) and R.M.L.I. (as infantry) have great historical records and a fine regimental sentiment and *esprit de corps*. There is a strong and healthy rivalry between them, which makes for the efficiency of both."⁷²⁷ Aston believed that the sentiments of senior naval

⁷²⁰ ADM 1/29279.

⁷²¹ ADM 1/29279, Appendix B, Uniform.

⁷²² ADM 1/29279, Appendix B, Uniform. For further details on the uniform changes in this period, see John Rawlinson, *Personal Distinctions*, 80-84.

⁷²³ HC Deb 28th March 1923, vol 162, cc.472-473.

⁷²⁴ HC Deb 28th March 1923, vol 162, cc.472-473.

⁷²⁵ "The Royal Marines", *The Times* (London, England), Thursday, 26 April 1923, 12.

⁷²⁶ "The Royal Marines", *The Times*, 12.

⁷²⁷ "Fusion Of Royal Marines", *The Times* (London, England), Friday, 27 April 1923, 17.

officers was that the amalgamation should not proceed, stating, “my naval friends, from flag officers downwards, now serving the Fleet are unanimously opposed to the change.”⁷²⁸ In another letter to *The Times*, Aston wrote on the prospect of the impending amalgamation, as a crisis facing the Corps not dissimilar to the dissolution of certain British Army regiments: “I fear that the time is far distant when the [R.M.] Forces also will be abolished altogether, if the war-lesson of the need for intense specialization is ignored, and they aspire to be experts in everything.”⁷²⁹

This sentiment was evoked and endorsed by others, including Admiral Henry Campbell in a similar letter to *The Times*, stating, “they are invisible forces and hard to define, but of their presence and effect there can be no doubt.”⁷³⁰ Adding his voice to this was Admiral Bacon, whose experience with the Marines at Zeebrugge added further weight. Bacon cited the so called “meddling” of the Conservative government as a wasteful enterprise, and endorsed the belief that the “emulation and friendly” within the Corps between the RMA and RMLI was in fact a “subtle source of efficiency”.⁷³¹ Bacon implored the government and the country:

Remember, it was the Marine Artillery who were chosen at a moment’s notice to man the 15in. howitzers on the Western front, who manned the new batteries for the defence of the Fleet at Scapa and Cromarty, who formed the expeditionary artillery in Africa, and performed many other services during the war. Whatever they did they did really well.⁷³²

Despite Aston’s assertions, and that of others, that the merging was at odds with sentiments of senior naval officers, there were dissenting voices. William Adair, who had retired in 1911 at the head of Corps as Deputy Adjutant-General Royal Marines, and whose family retained a long heritage service in the Corps⁷³³, weighed in with opposing views put forward by George Aston, stating that most senior naval officers were unlikely to be sympathetic to these proposals affecting the Corps:

My only real disagreement with Sir George is as to the opinion of senior naval officers on the subject, my experience being that most of them are in favour of the proposed re-amalgamation, which is no new idea. In 1880 it only failed of execution by the fall of the Government; in 1902, under Sir John Fisher’s scheme for the

⁷²⁸ “Fusion Of Royal Marines”, *The Times*, 17.

⁷²⁹ “Fusion Of Royal Marines”, *The Times*, 8.

⁷³⁰ “The Royal Marines”, *The Times* (London, England), Tuesday, 15 May 1923, 10.

⁷³¹ “The Royal Marines”, *The Times*, 10.

⁷³² “The Royal Marines”, *The Times*, 10.

⁷³³ The significance of a former head of the Corps, as well as a member of the Adair family on this issue was noteworthy. The Adair family has a long tradition of service in the Corps. William Adair’s own father, General Sir Charles William Adair, KCB, was himself the head of the Corps as Deputy Adjutant General Royal Marines from 1878 to 1883. Another family member, the aforementioned Captain Charles William Adair served as the commander of the marine detachment on HMS *Victory* where he was killed. Adair Street in Portsmouth outside the Eastney Royal Marine Barracks is named for the Adair family marines.

common entry of officers R.N. and R.M as a commencement or re-amalgamation, the newly commissioned officers R.M.A and R.M.L.I. were placed on one list. What happened on the subject in 1919 Sir George Aston probably knows better than myself. It is true the Board of Admiralty is now backed up by the need for economy and the decay of Forton Barracks, but the scheme has long been over-ripe.⁷³⁴

Adair closed with deep sympathies over the demise of the RMA, but stated the unavoidable reality of the situation: “we have been schooled to the amalgamation of distinguished units of the Army – nay, even to their total abolition.”⁷³⁵ The difference here, plain to all involved, is the army’s traditions survived in a reconstituted regiment, whereas the Marines would not.

To this point, one retired Admiral, Sydney Eardley-Wilmot, known for his writing on naval history and future naval warfare⁷³⁶, wrote that while the marines were “a splendid body of men” whose “loyalty to the Navy is beyond question,” that he had advocated some years ago that the two bodies of the RMA and RMLI be merged.⁷³⁷ Eardley-Wilmot suggested that “the conditions are now very different from what they were when the Marine Artillery was instituted.”⁷³⁸ The naval gunnery school at HMS *Excellent* now provided the navy with large numbers of trained seaman gunners. Furthermore, the formation of marines forces at sea was due in part to difficulty in manning ships and there had been at one time an “advantage to have a number of well-disciplined men on board in case of insubordination.”⁷³⁹ Eardley-Wilmot stated further that “as one Corps of Royal Marines, their traditions will animate them in the future, as in the past.”⁷⁴⁰ Another anonymous letter, reputedly from a retired officer of Marines, weighed in on the subject stating that naval officers were unlikely to offer comment, “being that they have been fairly contented to get the work done on board ship, and so long as it was well done it has not mattered much to them who did it.”⁷⁴¹ The writer opined that the present concerns of many of the marine officers writing in to *The Times*, over seemingly trivial matters over what colour uniforms the men might wear, paled in comparison to what might be ahead stating, “I foreshadow greater changes in the future as far as economy is concerned.”⁷⁴²

Ultimately, fiscal pressures prevailed and the decision towards amalgamation was decided. A detailed point on the matter of economies and exact monies saved, a figure of

⁷³⁴ “Fusion Of Royal Marines”, *The Times*, 15.

⁷³⁵ “Fusion Of Royal Marines”, *The Times*, 15.

⁷³⁶ Rear Admiral Sydney Marrow Eardley Wilmot entered the navy in 1866 and served nearly 65 years. He was also a prolific writer on naval topics, including novels on how future wars might turn out. His book *The Next Naval War*, (Edward Stanford: London, 1894) focused on a hypothetical naval conflict with France while another work, *The battle of the North Sea*, (Hugh Rees: London, 1912) made predictions about a key set battle at sea in a coming war with Germany.

⁷³⁷ “The Royal Marines”, *The Times* (London, England), Wednesday, 30 May 1923,15.

⁷³⁸ “The Royal Marines”, *The Times*, 15.

⁷³⁹ “The Royal Marines”, *The Times*, 15.

⁷⁴⁰ “The Royal Marines”, *The Times*,15.

⁷⁴¹ “The Royal Marines”, *The Times* (London, England), Wednesday, 23 May 1923, pg. 6.

⁷⁴² “The Royal Marines”, *The Times*, 6.

some £50,000, was focused on by figures such as Aston as well as in Parliament. Aston cited that, "it is by closing Forton Barracks, not by 'amalgamation' that the £50,000 will be saved."⁷⁴³ This figure was fixed upon again in June, when questions in Parliament rounded on the actual savings that would be brought about by amalgamation, but without closure of barracks themselves.⁷⁴⁴ The Admiralty had already considered closure of Forton Barracks due in part to the costs of repair. By June 1923, the decision was made and announced by the King, as Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Marines, as follows:

It is with great regret that, in consequence of the reduction in numbers, and the necessary financial economies necessitating the abolition of one of the historic divisions, I have concurred in the amalgamation of the Royal Marine Artillery and the Royal Marines Light Infantry. The two branches during their period as separate units have each worthily upheld the traditions of the old Corps of Royal Marines from which they were derived. As their Colonel-In Chief, I desire to express to them my appreciation of their former services, and I am confident that, under the new title of Royal Marines, they will continue to maintain that reputation for loyalty and devotion to duty which has ever been the pride of the Corps of Royal Marines.⁷⁴⁵

The message from the King was personal and relayed the sense of regret and loss that was shared between the Corps and the Sovereign. The Corps had, up to this time, depended upon the grace and favour of the highest of persons that took an interest into the security and efficiency of the Royal Marines. The message also relayed to the public the new title of Royal Marines, which in fact reverted the Corps name to its earlier state just over a century ago. The message confirmed the abolition of the Royal Marines Artillery at Eastney, with the merging of the marines at Eastney with the division of marines at Gosport; Gosport would be emptied as a cost saving measure to the Admiralty. The three divisions of Plymouth, Portsmouth, and Chatham would be maintained at equal strength with marines drafted from Eastney and Forton to balance the numbers.⁷⁴⁶ The final decision on uniform was announced that all marines would adopt the blue tunic, and the colours last issued by the Queen in 1894 should be retained, that of the Portsmouth Division being moved to Eastney. Instruction in artillery would not cease, however, and Eastney remained the place of instruction for all marines, and all marines would be trained as infantry soldiers with further instruction in naval gunnery.⁷⁴⁷ The titles of 'gunner' and 'private', were now dropped in favour of that of 'marine' for the enlisted ranks.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴³ "Fusion Of Royal Marines", *The Times*, 17.

⁷⁴⁴ HC Deb 27th June 1923, vol 165, cc.2296-2298.

⁷⁴⁵ "Future Of Royal Marines", *The Times* (London, England), Saturday, 23 June 1923, 14.

⁷⁴⁶ "Future Of Royal Marines", *The Times*, 14.

⁷⁴⁷ "Future Of Royal Marines", *The Times*, 14.

⁷⁴⁸ "Future Of Royal Marines", *The Times*, 14.

What conclusions can be drawn about the amalgamation? Many of the arguments proposed were emotive, rather than coldly logical, and were built on records of faithful service that did not correspond easily to fiscal realities or operational necessities. The Corps could no longer avoid these problems. The recognition that now a clear mission had to be defined, a fact long avoided since the mid to late nineteenth century, was now showing what delays had caused to the organisational structure of the Corps having failed to evolve. The Corps might well have considered itself lucky to have survived at all. With the number of army infantry regiments being disposed of post-war, no clear distinction could be made for retention of yet another regiment of infantry – the only murky distinction was the marine was accustomed to service at sea and belonged to the Admiralty – so long as the Admiralty could have need of them, they would stay. The amalgamation of the two Corps into one, made the Royal Marines an infantry organisation for service from the sea. The Royal Marines supporting arms, such as artillery or engineers, organic to their regiment, but are instead supported by units from the British Army who receive cross training with the Royal Marines through a special course.⁷⁴⁹ With the process of amalgamation concluded, attention was brought to a central issue which had plagued the Corps for some time: the problem of a definitive mission.

The Madden Committee - What is the Corps the mission?

While amalgamation was underway, the unresolved question was the actual purpose of the Corps. At this time, the Royal Marines had no specific responsibility for amphibious warfare, and some popular views consigned the Marines as a drain on Admiralty resources and as a fiscal restraint, rather than a unique organisation of relevance. The most urgent issue affecting the Corps, was the Economy Committees of Parliament eyeing the Royal Marines entire abolition as a means to save a substantial £400,000, for which “a case could be made for the abolition of the Marines which could be difficult to resist.”⁷⁵⁰

In September 1923, a memorandum from Captain Vernon Haggard, the Director of Training and Staff Duties⁷⁵¹ for the Royal Navy, outlined the reasons for a new committee to be created which would examine functions and training of the Royal Marines. This was a residual priority identified from the amalgamation, noting that the “functions of the Royal Marines are not laid down,” and also that the “conditions of service have changed since the corps was first formed, their original purpose has been outgrown.”⁷⁵² Training of the

⁷⁴⁹ These are 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery and the 24 Commando Regiment Royal Engineers who are attached to 3 Commando Brigade in Plymouth. The All-Arms Commando Course, open to members of the other British forces and certain allied military partners, offers an orientation and qualification to work with and integrate into the Royal Marine Regiment.

⁷⁵⁰ ADM 1/8665/134, “Functions and Training of the Royal Marines”.

⁷⁵¹ The DTSD was a naval officer (usually a captain) employed within the Admiralty who was mainly responsible for the administration of officers’ education.

⁷⁵² ADM 1/8665/134.

Corps and the marines could also not be attained “without a definite purpose to aim at”.⁷⁵³ It was acknowledged further that the recent “disturbance in the corps” caused by the recent amalgamation of the light infantry and artillery, and only served to accentuate the problems; “postponement now can only pave the way to another disturbance in the corps later,” it was stated.⁷⁵⁴ Haggard voiced this last point with some dismay, as he had in March earlier that year, urgently noted that a major reorganisation of the Corps had been seemingly rushed through to cut costs without a real opportunity to examine in detail the important questions of mission, training, and organisation: “if the need for economy were not so urgent it would be desirable to delay giving effect to the decision to amalgamate the R.M.A. and R.M.L.I. pending the report of the above committee, observing that this decision is based upon economic considerations and only involves a saving of £47,000.”⁷⁵⁵

The committee was established under the supervision of Admiral Sir Charles E. Madden, known from then on as the Madden Committee, was composed of four naval officers and two Royal Marine officers, which included the serving and a future adjutant general, and the secretary of the Admiralty. The committee would examine the functions and training of Royal Marines, “to consider & report on functions, strength, organisation & equipment of the [R.M.] Corps”.⁷⁵⁶ The reasons were set out formulaically, noting the present circumstances of “financial difficulty when the services are liable to be placed at the mercy of Economy Committees”, with an acknowledgement that the Corps mission was ill defined and out of date: “The functions of the Royal Marines are not laid down. Their conditions of service have changed since the corps was first formed, their original purpose has been outgrown, and has not revised in the light of modern requirements.”⁷⁵⁷ Recognition of this fact by the committee at this critical juncture undermines the argument of Zerbe that the Corps functions or doctrine, amphibious or otherwise, were clearly scripted. It was acknowledged that the recent upheaval in the Corps, now presented an opportunity to be taken up urgently: “The disturbance in the corps occasioned by the recent amalgamation of the R.M.L.I. and R.M.A. accentuates rather than diminishes the present necessity for reaching a decision upon their functions; and since conditions in the Corps are now in a state of flux, the opportunity for laying down a well thought out policy for the future is excellent. Postponement now can only pave the way to another disturbance in the corps at a later date.”⁷⁵⁸ Deputy Adjutant General, H.E. Blumberg, having only recently supervised the Corps amalgamation, had long lobbied for a summit on these matters and responded early with his views on the early proposals set forth from

⁷⁵³ ADM 1/8665/134, “Functions and Training of the Royal Marines”.

⁷⁵⁴ ADM 1/8665/134.

⁷⁵⁵ ADM 1/29279, “RMA and RMLI, Amalgamation”.

⁷⁵⁶ ADM 1/8664/134.

⁷⁵⁷ ADM 1/8664/134.

⁷⁵⁸ ADM 1/8664/134.

the Admiralty. Blumberg pushed back on two early recommendations he felt were attacks on the unique character of the Corps. Firstly, that Marine Officer training should be kept separate “in a military form and atmosphere”, and secondly, the urging for consolidation of the entire Corps to Portsmouth and out of the other home ports “could not be done without destroying the whole character of the service and making it so unpopular that recruiting would become impossible.”⁷⁵⁹ Blumberg clearly felt the linkage to the port town communities was important to the character of the Corps, but practical reasons for mobilising and training detachments for the fleet were also in his mind.

Drawing on the rich history of experience

With a clear mandate, the committee deliberated on the appropriate functions following a lengthy consideration of recently assigned tasks. It used several sources to inform their conclusions. Firstly, the rich history both past and present of the Corps’ relationship with the navy, secondly, the recent innovations of the US Marine Corps, and finally, the reflections of the more experienced junior officers from its own ranks.

Acknowledging the fact that the early regiments were utilised in part to fulfil manning requirements for the fleet, as they were still being done in the late nineteenth century and even early twentieth century, it was the “large number of amphibious operations” the committee drew attention to, such as the seizure of Gibraltar in 1704.⁷⁶⁰ The reconstitution of the Corps under the Admiralty cited the necessity of marines to outfit the fleet for what was described as periods of almost continuous warfare from 1755 to 1815. Marines were at that time essential for maintaining discipline at sea, and that the 1853 Continuous Service Act in turn made this role largely redundant.⁷⁶¹ It next cited that “compared with the preceding century, the period of 1815-1914 was for England a century of peace”, but with several “colonial wars” in which the Corps took part. While marines were no longer needed for close ship engagements, the findings stated, a justification to keep marines on ships were the landing parties and the need to man more guns on ships of the fleet. With this historic perspective, the findings then focused sharply on the employment of the marines, and the absence of specific guidance or instructions as it pertained to any use for organised expeditionary purposes designed for assaults from the sea: “It is perhaps idle to speculate as to whether the course of events during the war would have been appreciably altered if the value of such a force to the Navy had been more fully explored in the preceding years and a definite place assigned to it in the sphere of Naval Operations.”⁷⁶² The committee cited the inefficient utilisation of the marines during the Great War, especially in the early operations in Belgium which it described as an “an

⁷⁵⁹ ADM 1/18664/134, “Functions and Training of Royal Marines”, Blumberg Paper “A”.

⁷⁶⁰ ADM 1/8665/134.

⁷⁶¹ ADM 1/8665/134.

⁷⁶² ADM 1/8665/134.

infantry brigade, totally un-organised” and “hastily formed” which had failed “as a Naval operation, to prevent the enemy from forming submarine bases.”⁷⁶³ It also cited how the equally hurried infantry brigade of the Royal Navy was rushed to the Dardanelles in the Gallipoli expedition, “was only partially trained and, later, came under the Army, gradually dwindling to one Battalion owing to the Naval requirements prevented the sending of [re-inforcements].”⁷⁶⁴ It also concluded that with the absence of marines in the navy, the duties that recently had fallen to marines would have to be replaced by army soldiers or navy seamen:

However gallant the Seaman may be and however gallantly he may be led he can never under present conditions afford the time to become a really efficient soldier, the best he can hope for is to become an indifferent Marine. He could probably perform the duties nearly as well as the present untrained Marine but that is not good enough and the statement is rather a plea for the better training of the Marine than for his replacement by the Seaman.⁷⁶⁵

The committee recommendations fell short of suggesting that Marine officers be in command of detachments on land or in landing parties: “At the same time this mixture of Naval and Military qualifications produces indirectly a further and highly important quality which soldiers lack. This can be described as the amphibious quality.”⁷⁶⁶ It was concluded that the experience of marines on ships, as a ‘naval force’, would make them naturally suited to embarkation and disembarkation: “The amphibious quality coupled with the fact that Marines are carried in most ships gives the Navy the power of extending its grip ashore to a modest degree on all stations, and enables the mobility of ships to be turned to full account for all operations within the scope of the ship’s detachments. Thus the Marines have a peculiar value and par in the Navy that the Army cannot replace.”⁷⁶⁷ The committee was not prepared therefore, to venture further from the contemporary thinking of marine employment.

Consideration was next given to recent exercises by the Americans since the war on amphibious operations, undertaken by the US Marine Corps. The US Marines had formed a unit at Quantico in Virginia, reorganised as an expeditionary force and conducted a large scale landing at Culebra, Puerto Rico in 1916.⁷⁶⁸ These were part of a new concept known as the Advanced Based Force, not dissimilar from Hankey’s, and prompted the reorganisation of the US Marines around this new mission of seizing and defending temporary bases for the navy.⁷⁶⁹ This experiment, along with serious study of the

⁷⁶³ ADM 1/8665/134, “Functions and Training of the Royal Marines”.

⁷⁶⁴ ADM 1/8665/134.

⁷⁶⁵ ADM 1/8665/134.

⁷⁶⁶ ADM 1/8665/134.

⁷⁶⁷ ADM 1/8665/134.

⁷⁶⁸ Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 282-286.

⁷⁶⁹ Millett, 285.

amphibious strategy in the Pacific sanctioned by the Commandant of the US Marine Corps, John A. Lejeune, demonstrated to what extent the US Marine Corps was permitted to develop and innovate these ideas. While the United States had not solved the problem of combined or joint operations, the United States Marine Corps at least had a clearer mission in mind. The development of these ideas throughout the 1920s, and into the 30s, remained more theoretical than practical, but tactical manuals and papers on amphibious thought and strategy became the foundation of the amphibious doctrine employed by the US Marine Corps in the Pacific during the Second World War.⁷⁷⁰ The US Marine Corps, which had up to this time so closely mirrored the Royal Marines, would now definitively begin to evolve along its own very different path.⁷⁷¹

The commission had made extensive use of new reports and recorded observations by the Americans on the Great War and their belief that the next war would see naval operations of a decidedly amphibious nature. The committee scrutinised the conclusions of the US Marine Corps on the Gallipoli campaign: “One of the greatest disasters in history was the failure of the Gallipoli campaign in the World War. How different the result would probably have been if the British Mediterranean Fleet had been accompanied by an adequate expeditionary force when its first attack was made.”⁷⁷² Another published report of interest was by US Marine Major E.H. “Pete” Ellis for the US Navy in 1921 concerning the US posture in the Pacific in the event of war with Japan.⁷⁷³ Ellis concluded the US would need advanced bases, but was concerned with the problem of efficient combined operations between the army and the navy in order to guarantee these aims:

Experience itself is comparatively limited; as a result of which it is to be expected that the development of combined operations has been backward. Such is submitted to be the case; we are lacking in knowledge and the development in organization, administration, tactics and material necessary for successful combined operations. For instance – navies have given very little thought to their own tactics for supporting landings against opposition; no one has paid much attention to even designing equipment specially adapted for the purpose; and the instances of actual exercise of troops in making landings are certainly few.⁷⁷⁴

The committee also included a 1924 report from the US Marine Corps, which noted that: “the United States authorities have given considerable thought and attention to the

⁷⁷⁰ Donald Bittner, “Curriculum Evolution Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 1920-1988, Occasional Paper, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, US Marine Corp, Washington DC, 1988, 15-17; Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 259-260.

⁷⁷¹ Heather Venable has mapped extensively in her study of the early organisational culture of the US Marine Corps, how the US emulated to a great extent the Royal Marines. Following a similar set of crises, the early twentieth century saw the US Marines finally diverging significantly in a doctrinal sense from their British peers. See Venable in *How the Few Became The Proud: Crafting the Marine Corps Mystique. 1874-1918*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019) 4, 45, 47.

⁷⁷² ADM 1/8665/134, here the committee cites the report and comments made by General John A. Lejeune, USMC.

⁷⁷³ The 1921 writings of Major Ellis have been recorded and republished by the US Marine Corps as, FMFRP 12-46, *Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia*, (Quantico: U.S. Marine Corps, 1992).

⁷⁷⁴ Cited from Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 258.

functions, organisation, and training, of their Marine Corps, and have included in it a considerable body of men trained to operate with their fleet and to secure for it suitable oversea bases, so essential in a naval war conducted at some distance from bases in the United States. We should be glad to see the value of the Royal Marine Corps for similar operations appreciated with equal clearness.”⁷⁷⁵ The Royal Navy and the Army were giving extensive thought to these experiences and how to improve their joint operations. How and if the Royal Marines were to be reorganised along any improved model for efficiency was more problematic.

Finally, the committee pored over a paper submitted by the previously cited Major Charles Frederick Jerram. Jerram was a member of the up and coming junior officer ranks who entered the Corps before the war and therefore had experience of service at sea in the traditional occupations of marines with the fleet, but had also seen combat with the Naval Division. He had personally experienced Gallipoli and the Western Front and was five times mentioned in dispatches.⁷⁷⁶ Jerram’s observations were in fact the only ones included from the population of junior officers of the Corps, lending a critical voice to the hard lessons and experiences of the recent war. In this light, his perspective was therefore important and served as a good representation of views put forward by officers in this period.

Jerram addressed his comments broadly along two specific items, firstly his thoughts on improving the Royal Marines for “its efficiency and usefulness to the Royal Navy and the Empire”, and secondly, his proposals for the useful employment of marine officers in senior ranks.⁷⁷⁷ The latter had been a source of discontent for a considerable time. Jerram stated that except for the period from 1915 to 1919 where he served with the Naval Division and in staff jobs, his entire career had been one of service at sea which he believed “that except as a Naval Force the Royal Marines can have no justification for their continued existence.”⁷⁷⁸ Jerram felt it essential to establish this point, lest he be mistaken for what he called the “ultra-Military School” of marines who had seen the main action of the war on land, not at sea, and believed the destiny of the Corps to be more closely aligned towards operations on land, which had its own problems.⁷⁷⁹ Jerram then succinctly stated what several others had written about over the years, that “England being a Maritime power, whenever she fights on land she will have to transport her Armies overseas; in other words she will always fight in an amphibious War and the Navy will have the first part of it. That being so it would seem almost a necessity that a body of

⁷⁷⁵ ADM 1/8665/134.

⁷⁷⁶ Jerram, *A Soldier Gone to Sea*, 174-175.

⁷⁷⁷ ADM 1/8665/134, “Functions and Training of the Royal Marines”, Paper by Major Charles F. Jerram, 1.

⁷⁷⁸ ADM 1/8665/134, 1.

⁷⁷⁹ In this way, Jerram echoes the impressions made in the introduction of this thesis by Capt James Sladden, RM, of the Royal Marines of today largely shaped by experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, neither of which saw Commando operations or any sea based activity; ADM 1/8665/134, “Functions and Training of the Royal Marines, Paper by Major Charles F. Jerram, CMG, DSO, RM, 1.

troops be maintained, trained to the Navy's way for use."⁷⁸⁰ Jerram clearly believed that the identity of the Royal Marines was inextricably linked to a function within the Royal Navy, which he also believed retained was significant to a British national maritime identity.

He next outlined his suggestions on the best employment of the Corps. These included his belief that the Corps should work in close conjunction with the navy for purposes primarily naval in nature: the seizure of ports, destruction of enemy bases, punitive expeditions from the ships of fleet dispatched to the point of crisis, and preliminary landings for follow on forces of army troops. To his last point, Jerram stated the marines were not to join the army forces, but having done their job, would reform and re-embark with the fleet for their next mission.⁷⁸¹ Jerram insisted that, "the Marines are to be a Naval Force whose base is the Sea and mobility dependent on the sea".⁷⁸² Reflecting on his Gallipoli experience, Jerram stated:

It is the Navy's duty and proud privilege to be able to carry a threat against any part of the frontier. There is no threat in the presence of a few ships as was seen in Gallipoli; but when those ships carry a Striking Force the threat becomes a very real one and one which the enemy cannot ignore. The threat must be a combination of ships and Striking Force, when the Navy and the Country recognise this, the problem of the Royal Marines is solved.⁷⁸³

Interestingly, Jerram argued for the numerically smaller but geographically dispersed Corps to abandon the Division structure and consolidate in one dockyard location. The actual size Jerram stated, should be that of an Infantry Division, or Brigade size if manning was a restriction, supported by its own "following" of supporting arms of signallers, engineers and light mobile artillery.⁷⁸⁴ Bolder reforms to fleet manning were presented, and Jerram considered the role of marines as gunners on ships dated stating, "there are many duties in Ships where a knowledge of Gunnery is valueless."⁷⁸⁵ The same was said of the 'off jobs' on the ship from storekeeper, mess servants and stokers.⁷⁸⁶ On one point Jerram was emphatic, namely that of the command of and over the Marines: "The Command of the Marines should be retained in the hands of its officers right through top to bottom."⁷⁸⁷ Jerram also advocated that the Corps should have as its head a

⁷⁸⁰ ADM 1/8665/134, "Functions and Training of the Royal Marines", Paper by Major Charles F. Jerram, 8.

⁷⁸¹ ADM 1/8665/134, 8.

⁷⁸² ADM 1/8665/134, 9.

⁷⁸³ ADM 1/8665/134, 19.

⁷⁸⁴ Today, the engineer and pioneer roles have merged into a role known as the engineers, and signallers are now organic to most every military formation as well as their own independent specialisation. The artillery and engineers of the Royal Marines Commandos are today sourced from designated British army units that are attached to the Royal Marines Commando Brigade who also receive Commando training; ADM 1/8665/134 – Functions and Training of the Royal Marines, Paper by Major Charles F. Jerram, 13.

⁷⁸⁵ ADM 1/8665/134, 14-15.

⁷⁸⁶ ADM 1/8665/134 16-17.

⁷⁸⁷ ADM 1/8665/134, 16-17.

Lieutenant General who would also have a seat on the Board of the Admiralty so as to best advise the Navy.⁷⁸⁸ Jerram commented likewise on the broadening of opportunities for senior Marine officers in the Admiralty, The War Office, and Colonial Office or as Governors of military and colonial provinces.⁷⁸⁹ “Even present Senior Officers of the Corps might be well employed, they are not nearly so useless as seems to be very generally supposed.”⁷⁹⁰

Jerram’s aim was ultimately to inspire and direct a new organisational structure and purpose to the Corps. Even while his ideas were not immediately acted upon, the Royal Marines in fact years later utilised an expeditionary brigade structure, supported by engineers and artillery, which exists today as the 3 Commando Brigade; in this way, Jerram’s ideas were in fact prescient.

The committee submitted its report on 6 August 1924, concluding that the corps had three essential functions, listed in order of importance. The first function directed the Marines to provide detachments, as it had always done, for service on the ships of the fleet. Not surprisingly, the committee concluded that one of the original functions of the Corps, keeping order and discipline on ships, was now no longer necessary.⁷⁹¹ To this the committee added the necessity of marines being utilised in landing parties for punitive expeditions and “shore operations on a small scale with a limited objective.”⁷⁹² The committee was against the idea of the utilisation of marines in fixed garrison duties, which would affect the manning, training, and readiness for the purposes of fleet manning.⁷⁹³

The second function directed that the Marines were to provide forces “to carry out operations for the seizure and defence of temporary bases, and raids on the enemy coast line and bases, under the direction of the Naval Commander-In-Chief.”⁷⁹⁴ These forces were to seize and hold advanced bases for the Fleet using a Mobile Naval Base or MNB concept, to carry out attacks on the enemy’s bases and lines of communication in order to assist the either navy or army objectives, and finally to assist in the landing or evacuation of army forces from a hostile coast. Recalling the earlier work of Hankey, this function known as the Mobile Naval Base Organisation or simply the MNB was formally adopted, but predicated on a projected steady but conservative increase in manning.⁷⁹⁵ The committee reflected that previous wars and campaigns in which Britain had embarked upon, had frequently relied on the use of existing British territories or friendly ports from

⁷⁸⁸ The Corps has had, at intervals, a Major General, Lieutenant General.

⁷⁸⁹ ADM 1/8665/134, “Functions and Training of the Royal Marines”, 1924. Paper by Major Charles F. Jerram, 18. The present day British armed forces have seen a proliferation of Royal Marines Officers in senior defence roles such as Gordon Messenger and Charlie Stickland.

⁷⁹⁰ ADM 1/8665/134, 18.

⁷⁹¹ ADM 1/8665/134, 11.

⁷⁹² ADM 1/8665/134.

⁷⁹³ ADM 1/8665/134, 13.

⁷⁹⁴ ADM 1/8665/134.

⁷⁹⁵ ADM 1/8665/134. Also see Bittner, “Britannia’s Sheathed Sword”; and Richard Harding, “Learning From The War: Development of British Amphibious Capability, 1919-1929”, *The Mariner’s Mirror*, 86, no.2, (May 2000): 173-185.

which to land and build up forces, but the future of such an eventuality was no longer a certainty. The committee proposed a revised statement on the purpose of the Royal Marines stating:

we shall describe the Corps as an integral and essential part of the Naval Forces, whose duties fall under two headings, first, duties afloat, which it is called upon to discharge in common with all branches of the Naval Forces, and secondly specialist duties on shore which constitute its [raison d'être] as a separate branch of the Naval Service, and for which its military training is necessary.⁷⁹⁶

The third function was that the Marines might “serve as a connecting link between the Navy and the Army.”⁷⁹⁷ Following submission of the report, the findings were scrutinised by the Admiralty, among them Roger Keyes, now Deputy Chief of Naval Staff. Keyes, who planned and led the Zeebrugge raid, agreed that the third function, service as a connecting link to the army, should be struck as it was determined that “liaison of this kind is a function of the Naval Staff to which the Board can and do appoint Marine Officers.”⁷⁹⁸ The committee also concluded that it was not the duty of the navy to furnish troops for another service, namely the army, stating that despite the duty of the services to work in unison and in mutual support, “we consider that it is no part of the duty of the Admiralty to maintain or train forces solely with a view to their employment in operations which are the special province of another Service.”⁷⁹⁹ The Naval Division had filled this purpose, and the Admiralty had confronted this problem of manpower shortages and demands with the army.

The commission also concluded the Corps should be organised as an independent strike force. The manned strength of the ‘independent striking force’ was proposed at 3,400, which was four battalions or the size of a small infantry brigade, and force which the Corps expected could be reliably fielded based on the experience of the First World War. The committee believed that the present Division system, while not optimal, afforded the best existing structure from which to form and base three battalions of the new striking force, from which a fourth battalion would be drawn from these and the balance made up from reservists. The former divisions would continue to supply detachments to also man the fleet.

The Committee Concludes

While there was agreement between senior naval and marine officers over its conclusions, and perhaps even a feeling that now finally the Royal Marines had a better-

⁷⁹⁶ Underscoring as printed in the original source, ADM 1/8665/134.

⁷⁹⁷ ADM 1/8665/134.

⁷⁹⁸ ADM 1/8665/134.

⁷⁹⁹ ADM 1/8665/134.

defined mission, the Madden Committee brought no significant changes to the Royal Marines. The MNB concept went forward where it continued to be the nucleus of many further amphibious experiments, and for the purposes of establishing temporary naval bases, but only under benign conditions and not amphibious assault.⁸⁰⁰ Alan Millett has suggested this was because the presumption which prevailed was that a naval war would still be fought from fixed bases under allied control sited in home territories.⁸⁰¹ The 'independent striking force' was never properly realised. The Royal Navy could not justify further expenditure on a peace-time Royal Marines force, especially one demanding an increase of 16,000 men and officers in a time of post-war austerity and cuts levied by naval reduction treaties. Without the increase in troops, only a third of the Corps could expect, at best, to train for the naval strike force role and amphibious training. The limited increase in the number of Marines went to ships' detachments, a traditional mission and that which the Madden Committee listed as the first priority of the corps. Some units were sent overseas, such as the 11th R.M. Battalion in Turkey in 1922 to assist in the defence of Constantinople and the 12th R.M. Battalion in China in 1927 to help guard the international settlement in Shanghai. But they were raised on an ad hoc basis, sent to their destinations, served until the crisis passed, returned home, and then disbanded.⁸⁰²

Ultimately, while the Madden Report did serve to codify to an extent the role and functions of the marines, it did not radically alter the organisation of the Corps itself. Save for the MNB, the Corps role changed little from the routine of dockyard duties and manning detachments of the naval fleet. Ambitions for a devoted role in amphibious warfare were likewise not adopted or further developed, and no real efforts emerged to restructure the organisation to permit such an option. Marine identity, mission and function were still grounded in traditional roles in the fleet while the Royal Navy grappled with its own post-war fiscal constraints and navalist doctrine prevailed. Unbeknownst to the committee, the 1927 Madden Committee was the last opportunity for the Royal Marines to innovate change before it would be thrust upon them.

An amphibious epilogue and real transformation, 1927 to 1948

It would take the Second World War for Britain to realise its potential for the real meshing of land and naval forces in combined operations from the sea. While traditional roles remained in the ships of the fleet, the emergence of the new role as Commandos emerged in 1942. Inspired in part by operations like Zeebrugge, the new role held promise

⁸⁰⁰ Jerram commented on the inefficient use of the MNB extensively in his own memoirs, See Jerram, *A Soldier Gone to Sea*, 137-139. For an extensive evaluation of the MNB concept in the interwar years, as well as the impact of the Madden Committee findings, see Bittner, "Britannia's Sheathed Sword", 345-364.

⁸⁰¹ Allan R. Millett, "Assault From the Sea: The development of amphibious warfare between the wars – the American, British and Japanese experiences", in *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, edited by Williamson R. Murray and Allan R. Millett, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 54.

⁸⁰² Brief summary histories of these units, and all other ones raised in the interwar and World War II years, are in James Ladd, *The Royal Marines*, 362-64.

for real transformation. In 1948, the Corps experienced its greatest transformation of its identity and organisational purpose in the Commandos of the Second World War, an elite body created from both the army and navy.⁸⁰³ Following the war, the army discarded the role, which offered the Royal Marines the opportunity to fully assume what had been a successful role; the Corps was considering incorporating this distinctive title of 'Commandos' to their organisational name.⁸⁰⁴ Memorandums concerning the "Suggested alteration of the title Commando", detailed the nuances over a new titular designation, and which best described the organisation in its present state while also considering the title which was most recognisable to the public.⁸⁰⁵ The suggestion was raised for the Corps to be renamed 'The Royal Marines Commandos'. "Commandos", it was argued by its champions, was a "household name, known to every service and carries with it enormous prestige and morale value".⁸⁰⁶ The Corps Chief of Staff, D.D. Thomas, suggested "To change the title 'Commandos' for 'Light Infantry' which can be equally performed by Army units, or to give them another name which would not be clear to any other Services, to my mind at this moment is suicidal."⁸⁰⁷ Major General Lamplough of the Plymouth Division, a veteran of the 1918 raid on Zeebrugge, when asked to provide comment understood the value that the new term brought to the organisational identity of the Corps. Lamplough framed his thoughts in favour of the retention of the Commando title in terms of their effects tradition, national morale, and those officers and men who had lately entered the Corps as Commandos, stating that, "the effect of doing away with the term 'Commando' at the present time would be bad."⁸⁰⁸ A significant tranche of the Corps membership by now had been trained, seen war service as, and identified as Commandos. The title was adopted. The Corps had for years, since at least the mid-nineteenth century, struggled to adopt and define a coherent purpose; it was now seemingly in their grasp. In doing so, as mentioned previously by Julian Thompson, the Royal Marines adopted a new identity as well as organisational mission.⁸⁰⁹ The Commando title reflected both the new mission and specialised role which now informed a new identity for its members but might also guarantee its future.

Conclusion

The amalgamation of the two corps proved a traumatic event for the Corps in the early 1920s. The forced changes were in many ways more difficult than the hardships experienced during the recent war itself, as the new threats of fiscal austerity towards

⁸⁰³ The definitive history of the Royal Marines Commandos in this period has been written by James Ladd,

⁸⁰⁴ The Commandos had been created during World War II and were initially trained in Achnacarry, Scotland. For the British, the Commandos were part of both the Royal Navy and the Army. Other allied nations trained their own elite commandos at this location, many of which continue their traditions to this day from the formation of these units in Scotland in 1942. See Ladd, *By Sea By Land*, 137, Thompson, *Royal Marines*, 264, 302.

⁸⁰⁵ ADM 201/98, Suggested Alteration of Title "Commando".

⁸⁰⁶ ADM 201/98.

⁸⁰⁷ ADM 201/98.

⁸⁰⁸ ADM 201/98.

⁸⁰⁹ Thompson, *The Royal Marines*, 3.

naval and military expenditure proved to be an existential threat to the Royal Marines. The effect of this signalled a level of urgency towards identifying a cogent and achievable mission for the Corps, one that must prove distinctive in a way that would prevent the possibility of future redundancy. The event caused further suffering to the Corps, however, in that time otherwise spent on attending to consolidating the lessons of the recent war and focusing on their mission and better employment, instead had them reacting to their internal affairs. While the will was present, a clear method and decision as well as the proper direction from Admiralty authorities failed to allow this.

In this chapter, it has been shown how the Royal Marines struggled to adapt to the changes taking place as it affected technology, but also their employment in Britain's imperial defence needs in the both decades preceding the twentieth century and those which immediately followed. Whereas the Corps might have served as a 'bridge', linking the army and the navy and its needs related to amphibious planning, it was not in a position to do so. As a service within a larger service, its role and influence were much diminished in contrast to the larger entities of the Royal Navy and the British Army. The marines serving in the Naval Division were used to hold the line on the Western Front as common infantry, but ultimately gained little recognition for it as they strayed far from any distinguishable unique amphibious role; a problem which resonates with some Royal Marines Commandos today.

The findings of the 1927 Madden Committee proved the final opportunity for the Royal Marines to reshape their Corps in a similar manner as their peers elsewhere such as the United States Marine Corps or the Imperial Navy of Japan; but this was not to be. Ultimately, Britain became a leader in the execution of amphibious operations during the Second World War, as well as the necessity of cooperation between the services in combined operations and on a much larger scale with allies. The role of the Royal Marines, in this eventuality, would ultimately prove marginal.⁸¹⁰ A complete transformation would be required to redefine the Corps.

⁸¹⁰ Ian Speller, *The Role of Amphibious Warfare in British Defense Policy*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001) 75.

Conclusion

The continuity of the Royal Marines from 1827 to 1927 and how they struggled to promote their identity in a positive and meaningful way, reveals how failure to adapt early enough can mean extinction for organisations which fail to plan. It showed that identity must be malleable and flexible if it is to survive; the Royal Marines have so far proven they can. If governments and taxpayers are expected to continue to outlay resources and monies for the sustainment and modernisation of military forces, historical nostalgia is not a suitable rationale for continued existence. New advances in technology are again forcing navies to innovate, littoral strike is complicated by improved weapons with longer ranges and enhanced capabilities. Britain today at least recognises that amphibious warfare is a spectrum of warfare which cannot be entirely discarded, and not easily taken up again without relearning difficult lessons.

This thesis has argued that the Royal Marine identity, as it was created and based around army traditions, was fragile and also an impediment towards innovating real change. Thinking of themselves as members of an organisation apart or other than the navy, this put them in conflict with the navy. At the same time, links to the Naval Service were what defined them as something other than an army regiment. Their mission, once easily defined, was not in fact based on the idea of their organisation being an amphibious force. This has been argued contrary to more recent historiography presented by Britt Zerbe. The Royal Marines emphasised their unique identity as something other than a sailor or soldier; being a marine meant something and was something else. Yet while the Corps could point to and define a clear identity, this did not mean their continued employment was guaranteed. Tensions arose when it was clear that the marine identity sought in ways demonstrated here to emulate the army, causing a clash of culture with the parent service. Fixation on retaining the older missions from the days of sail, such as shipboard security and marine artillery, were shown to be anachronistic and distractions from the urgent necessity of defining a clear mission. The Corps had no clear claims to a coherent mission, and the concepts of amphibious warfare were tenuous and not well embraced by either the Corps itself or the parent service. The periods of tension between the Corps and the Royal Navy occurred when these competing cultures clashed, such as in the late nineteenth century when naval officers would routinely lead missions ashore which marine officers thought best befitted their own martial skill set. Marine artillery, originally intended as a touchstone for naval gunnery, soon came into competition with the necessity of improving naval gunnery organically. Grander designs of fully absorbing the marine officer role into that of the naval officer ranks, such as under the Fisher-Selborne scheme, and marines adopting naval uniforms were further challenges which have again been brought forward today. These were all seen as attacks and efforts to erode the distinct identity felt by the Corps membership. The term marine was yet to embody an elite image.

Marine officers had pursued a deliberate agenda of improving institutional identity, inculcating their membership with a clear understanding of their historical record and traditions. As the Corps grappled with the dual challenges of constructing and retaining a viable mission, its participation in the multitude of small wars of the nineteenth century served to simultaneously underscore both their contribution and their long held view, both in their own ranks and those of the public, that their efforts were frequently left unrewarded or under appreciated. The First World War served as the final great example of this during the period examined, subsuming the contributions of the entire Corps' organisation under the Naval Division and the fleet.

At the same time, the Corps also recognised that a unique characteristic of its organisation and identity was its clear link to the navy. Increasingly, emphasising how marines might best serve within the navy was what sparked both exciting opportunities, but also tension in resistance to change and calls for complete abolition of the Corps. The First World War might have furnished opportunities for furthering not only its public image, but also the more urgent matter of its organisational function. Instead, it faced a more urgent battle over its own institutional identity with the amalgamation of its own regiments. The image of the elite organisation was still years away, yet the idea that the Corps would need to fix itself to something utterly unique and inspirational in order to survive was not lost on its youngest generation of leaders.

The Royal Marines benefitted from their basing in a port town environment, an essential element for their success. Basing in these communities was necessary for rapid deployment with the Royal Navy, and also ensuring their presence was never far from the eyes and thoughts of the Admiralty. The urban port town environment had an effect on the development of the Corps, a crucible of sorts where multiple military communities intersected, and where interaction with the population was a source of tension but also essential to maintaining the more positive image of the Marines for the nation. Nowhere else was the bond between the Corps and country felt as strongly as in these communities. While the Marines were shaped by their experiences in these towns, this study has shown the Marines left their own lasting impression on the civic identity and fabric of these towns.

The Royal Marines demonstrate that identity is never fixed. At times fragile, the Corps's identity ultimately proved malleable and adaptable. Its earliest claimed origins showed a precarious and ephemeral quality to its structure, the marines could not ultimately link their identity and image to a particular mission or function without facing abolition. The Corps struggled with this necessity, failing at multiple opportunities to claim and define a clear role for itself. The Corps were not pioneers of amphibious doctrine, though they might have been its most likely implementors and custodians at such an early stage.

They would not be offered the opportunity to fundamentally recast their identity or secure a viable mission until a greater national crisis emerged during the Second World War.

The institutional expertise the United Kingdom possesses in amphibious warfare has been hard won and continues to be maintained today in the UK Armed Forces by a group of specialists, mainly found in the Royal Marines and in the Royal Navy's amphibious fleet. Dispensing with a unique cadre of military expertise from across the three Services or reducing it to the level where it cannot be deployed on a strategically meaningful scale, would be an irreparable act of folly. The UK is one of the few nations that have a sovereign capability in this specialism. Reductions of the type and scale that are reportedly being contemplated would wipe this out, and there would be no going back.⁸¹¹ In 2020, the Royal Marines again are embarking on a structural reorganisation and quest to distil the essence of their function and mission to the British armed forces. This endeavour is as much about organisational identity as it is about survival and emphasis on relevance. This thesis has shown that these matters are not new, and the forging of the Royal Marine identity has a progression and often contentious activity.

⁸¹¹ "Sunset for the Royal Marines? The Royal Marines and UK amphibious capability", House of Commons Defence Committee, 4 February 2018, 12.

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List of Abbreviations

ADM – Admiralty Records, The National Archives, Kew, London

CAB – Cabinet Papers, The National Archives, Kew, London

CCA – Churchill College Archives, Churchill College, Cambridge

CHAR – Chartwell Papers, Churchill College Archives, Cambridge

NMM – The National Maritime Museum, Caird Library, Greenwich

PHCRO - Portsmouth History Centre and Records Office

PROB – Probate Records, The National Archives, Kew, London

PWDRO – Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, Plymouth

RC – Royal Commission

RMM – The Royal Marines Museum, National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth

WO – War Office Records, The National Archives, Kew London

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CCA, The Fisher Papers

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