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## **The U.S. Marine as a Symbol of a Soldier and a Part of the American Myth**

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The United States has many symbols. Though most of them did not originate in the country, they have become the country's brand name in the perception of the general public. The history of the Marine Corps dates back to the ancient world, but modern formations of this type originated in the early 17th century, when the Netherlands, France and England began to compete for rule of the oceans. Marines are not only associated with the formation as such, but generally symbolize the American soldier, in particular one who serves outside the country, often as an instrument of Washington's intervention. According to the traditional understanding, Marines were organized in units which were present on every battleship. On the one hand, the soldiers were on guard to ensure the crew's discipline, while on the other they participated in onshore raids in small-scale operations. Until the Spanish-American War in 1898, the Marine Corps was a small battle unit, constantly threatened with being liquidated or absorbed by the army or the fleet. The outbreak of the war between the US and Spain changed the situation, giving way to a brilliant career for the Corps, which was not only saved but even developed by supporters of the idea of American expansionism who were then in power. Being stationed on board, they were always at hand, and thus became used to running small-scale operations, chiefly of a police nature, mainly in Central American republics and the Caribbean. Marines were also popular heroes in the press for their participation in topical events of US foreign policy, which promoted the Corps among US citizens. Newspapers contained photographs of young men with glowing smiles, sporting khaki uniforms and wide-brimmed hats, posing with weapons under a tropical sun. The fact that marines serve close to the President certainly contributes to their popularity. Marines of the HMX-1 helicopter squadron have the honor and responsibility of providing short-range air lift for the President of the United States. The orchestra that plays during official ceremonies at the White House is also part of the Corps. Marines continue to be an instrument of US intervention, and are employed to serve US foreign policy when the situation so requires. The US Marine Corps is one of the most recognizable combat forces worldwide, a flagship of the US armed force. Their popularity manifests itself also in the fact that they are frequent heroes of press releases, books and films.

*From the Halls of Montezuma,  
To the Shores of Tripoli;  
We fight our country's battles  
In the air, on land, and sea;  
First to fight for right and freedom  
And to keep our honor clean;  
We are proud to claim the title  
Of United States Marines.<sup>1</sup>*

The United States has many symbols. Although most of them have not originated in the country, they have become the country's brand name in the perception of the general public. A Native American should be a symbol of the entire western hemisphere, but they are chiefly associated with the US. Haven't we all heard about Winnetou, Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull or Geronimo? When we ask about the Gold Rush, almost everyone would say that it is about California and Alaska, but in the Middle Ages, Europe's largest gold and silver mines could be found across our southern border in Kremnica, Banská Bystrica and Banská Štiavnica which saw a mass-scale gold rush of their own. The symbol of the Marines has a similar history. The Marine Corps was formed for the first time by the British in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and Russia and China have the largest Marine troops after the US, but when we hear the term "Marines" we do not think about Chinese, Russian, Spanish, Venezuelan, Brazilian or Thai soldiers. Firstly, we associate them with the United States. However, Marines are not only associated with the formation as such, but generally symbolize the American soldier, in particular the one who serves outside the country, often as an instrument of Washington's intervention.

According to the traditional understanding, Marines were organized in units which were present on every battleship. On the one hand, the soldiers were on guard to ensure the crew's discipline, while on the other hand they participated in raids on shore in small-scale operations. During sea battles some of the soldiers operated ship cannons, whilst others were deployed to special platforms fixed on masts. From there they could sniper fire at enemy ships during short-distance fighting.

The history of the Marine Corps dates back to the ancient world, however, modern formations of this type originate from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the Netherlands, France and England began to compete for the rule of the oceans. France and the Netherlands created divisions of sailors trained in the art of fighting. In 1664, Great Britain formed the special Duke of York Maritime Regiment of Foot, entirely accountable to the Admiralty (the fleet command). It was also known as the Lord High Admiral's Regiment (Moulton 29-45; Field 1: 14-25).

During the armed conflict with Spain (1739-1741) the British created ten regiments of Marines to fight with Spanish troops in their colonies in the Caribbean Islands. At that time London asked their American colonies for the formation of four regiments of marine forces. In 1740, a unit of three thousand colonists was created under the command of Colonel William Gooch, thereafter known as Gooch's Marines. The

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<sup>1</sup> *History of the Marines Hymn*. USMC Heritage. Web. [http://www.usmcpres.com/heritage/marine\\_hymn.htm](http://www.usmcpres.com/heritage/marine_hymn.htm).

units took part in the battle of Cartagena in Colombia. A few months later they took the Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, where they were later stationed to protect the British sea base. In this way British colonists in America became familiar with the specificity of the services provided by the marine forces (Millett 3-4; Hearn 14).

The first surviving document about American Marines dates from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, 1775. It mentions Lieutenant James Watson as a Marine officer on the payroll of the sloop ship *Enterprise*. Although rebel colonies had already used marines from the spring of 1775, the actual birth of the Corps dates to the 10<sup>th</sup> of November, 1775. On that date the Continental Congress recommended the establishment of two battalions of marines composed of soldiers fighting in the Continental Army ("Journal of the Continental Congress" in Clark, Morgan 2: 957-958, 972).<sup>2</sup> Lacking other models, the Naval Committee issued instructions for the newly created unit following the regulations of the British Royal Marines ("Rules for the Regulations" in Clark, Morgan 2: 1174-1182; "First Commission" in Clark, Morgan 2: 1183; Ch.R. Smith 12; Fagan 5-15).

After the war ended, the history of the Continental Marine Corps came to an end. Continental Marines shared the fate of the Continental Navy and were dissolved in September 1783 (Moskin 33; Ch.R. Smith 292).

On the 11th of July 1798, with the re-establishment of the U.S. Navy, the United States Marine Corps was created. The Marines were to "keep discipline aboard ship, lead boarding parties and amphibious landings, fight with muskets in short-range naval battles, and, if the captain wished, work some of the ship's long guns. They would also man coastal installations and forts, or any other duty ashore, as the President, at his discretion, shall direct" ("Marine Corps" in *American State Papers* 1: 56; "An Act for the Establishing" in *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi War* 1: 188-189).

Already from the first instructions regarding recruitment it can be seen that it was planned to be an elite force. Volunteers whose age was from 18 to 40, who were at least 180 cm tall and who were of great physical fitness were accepted. Further on, the instruction reads that those who shouldn't be admitted are: "Negros, Mulattoes or Indians. Also foreign-born citizens of the United States could not make up more than one quarter of the Corps" ("To Lieutenant of Marines," "To Burrows" in *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi War* 1: 40-42, 376-377).

The Act of 1798 is rather unclear when it comes to defining the tasks and accountability of the Corps. When the Marines were ashore, they were subject to usual land army regulations, but while at sea they were under the command of ship captains and Marines instructions. As a result, the Marines were seen as both a part of the army and of the fleet, which made matters very complicated and caused confusion as to their service. The issue was regulated no earlier than in the Act of 1834 ("An Act for Establishing" in *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi War* 1: 188-189). The first Headquarters of the Corps were in Philadelphia, but in the summer of 1800 they were ordered to move to Washington where living standards were incomparably worse than in Philadelphia. The new capital of the US was then under construction and the Marines camp was stationed in tents near Germantown, until the Navy

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<sup>2</sup> In the documents, the word "Marines" appeared for the first time on 25.05.1775, in Jesse Root's correspondence with Silas Deane, but later it turned out it was wrongly used with regard to the escort which actually consisted of sailors (Clark, Morgan 1: 528-529).

Department purchased land for the permanent seat of the Corps. This happened in 1801, when a new quarter was bought on the southeastern edge of Washington, between the Capitol and the American Navy base (Navy Yard). The new location between the seat of the Congress and the Navy was by no means accidental. The Marines were expected to watch over US storage areas and ships as well as to guard government buildings.<sup>3</sup>

Relations between Marines and sailors on ships were rather tense. Sailors saw the Marines as “watchdogs” who did not want to participate in burdensome work on the ship, walking here and there on board and watching them to find any pretext to impose a penalty. At the same time, the quality of life of Marines depended on the relations between their officer and the ship’s captain. Unfortunately, relations were no better than those between the sailors and the soldiers. There were constant disputes about who was accountable to whom and what tasks the Marines should perform on board. According to the rules reigning at sea, the ship’s captain was first after God and was thus authorized to give the soldiers orders that were not included in their rules and regulations. Officers of the Marines protested out loud when their people were ordered to do physical and dirty work on the ships. Arguments were raised that this would undermine the soldiers’ authority in the eyes of the crew and, on top of this, soldiers should exercise to be fit for battle rather than doing the work of unskilled workers (“To the Secretary of the Navy,” “To Cmdt. W.W. Burrows,” “To Cmdt. W.W. Burrows, USMC, from Cpt. Lemuel Clark,” “To Capt. Silas Talbot” in *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi War* 7: 195, 197-198, 256, 264). The sailors’ general view on the *marines* service on board was expressed in the diary of one sailor:

[...] The officers of marines enjoy almost a sinecure in time of peace. They review the corps once a week and receive and transmit to the captain the reports of the sergeant, about the sum total of their labors – to perform which a ship of the line carries one captain and two lieutenants of marines. Thus, there has arisen a sailors’ saying that the mizzenroyal and the captain of marines are the two most useless things of board ship (Nordhoff 56-58, 63-64).

At that time, the Corps experienced problems with recruitment because of low wages, the specificity of serving at sea and the lower prestige than the one enjoyed by those serving in the army or the fleet, which did not contribute to making the Corps an attractive step in a military career (“Register of Officers US Marine Corps” in Collum 270-284). Often it was the case that only people who were forced by their life circumstances and were desperate to flee from unemployment, poverty and debt that took such a decision. This situation is perfectly rendered in a letter of one private who after two years of service in the Marines asked for earlier release, justifying his decision with the fact that he joined the Corps because of his failures in life and as an act of desperation (“Pvt. Henry S. Donley to Cmdt. A. Henderson” in *Letters Received, 1817-1915*, NA, RG 127).

No wonder then that the number of desertion cases was high. Throughout the

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<sup>3</sup> Units consisting of one sergeant and 8 Marines served on small frigates and one sergeant and 12 Marines on larger frigates (“An Act supplementary” in 3: 533; Schuon 5-6, 50-60).

three-year recruitment period (1821-1824) 607 Marines deserted. In the same period 191 Marines were put on trial for criminal offences and other offences not associated with desertion or neglecting their service duties ("Register of Desertions," "Marines tried by a court-martial" in *American State Papers* 2: 59-89).

Until the American-Spanish War in 1898, the Marine Corps were a small battle unit, constantly threatened with being liquidated or absorbed by the army or the fleet. Its specific type of service – guarding sailors on ships and running small-scale landing operations to protect American posts, mostly in the Caribbean – seemed rather outdated in the late nineteenth century. The new steel fleet did not need marines on board, but rather qualified specialists: engineers, mechanics or artillerymen. Depriving *marines* of their basic function for which they were established at the end of the 18th century threatened the annihilation of the Corps. The outbreak of the war between the US and Spain changed the situation, giving way to a brilliant career for the Corps, which was not only saved but even developed by the supporters of the idea of American expansionism who were then in power. The Marines service to US foreign policy did not come from nowhere. As a unit under the Navy Department it has inscribed itself into a long tradition of the US Fleet, which has been an instrument of diplomacy from the very beginning. As long as the native troops with whom captains of the American fleet sometimes had to conclude treaties, were equipped with primitive weapons, the landings of sailors and Marines under naval artillery cover was sufficient. However, when in the early twentieth century the armed forces of the then Third World acquired modern weapons from European countries, small-scale forays of sailors and Marines were not enough to win. Thus, effective quick response forces were needed which could easily be transported by the fleet in a relatively short period of time and deployed at any place in the western hemisphere whenever the situation required defending or rescuing life and property of US citizens and US interests, both economic and political. Washington assigned to the marines their tasks and methods, which meant guarding the strategic and economic interests of the United States throughout the world. This labelled the Corps as colonial soldiers. In his book *Imperial Grunts* Robert Kaplan reflects how strong that tradition is:

While I was at Camp Pendleton, Maj. Gen. James N. Mattis, the 1<sup>st</sup> Division's commander, delivered his pre-deployment brief to thousands of marines. He made it clear that not only were the Marines returning to Iraq, they were also returning to their roots as unconventional warriors: a tradition forged long ago in the Philippines and the Central American "Banana Wars" of the early of twentieth century, when Marines were referred to as the "State Department's troops" (309).

After the end of the American Civil War, many volunteers enrolled to the Corps. This permitted the use of more strict recruitment criteria, and as a result new recruits were physically fitter and better educated. On top of this, diverse tasks were assigned, from typical army exercise to engineering services, as well as some elements of specific training for ship servicing to develop their skills and knowledge. The fact that the marines chiefly served abroad and crossed the oceans to reach other continents, which broadened their horizons and their world outlook, whilst inland army soldiers stationed in the US did not have such opportunities for the most of their lives, was not of marginal importance. Officers of the Marines had a command of foreign languages and thanks to their contact with diplomatic and consular services

showed a high political awareness. Some of them ended up as ministers or advisors to Presidents of “Banana Republics”.

Interventions of units of the Marines strengthened their reputation of remarkably well-trained soldiers, capable of engaging into combat almost right away. Being stationed on board they were always at hand, so they used to run small-scale operations, chiefly of a police nature, mainly in Central American republics and the Caribbean. The easy use of Marines in ad-hoc pacifications or swift forays to protect the life and property of American citizens, contributed to the growing prestige of the Marines in the US Army.

Marines were also popular heroes in the press for their participation in topical events of US foreign policy, which promoted the Corps among US citizens. Newspapers showed photographs of young men brimming with obstreperous smiles, sporting their khaki uniforms and wide-rimmed hats and posing with arms under a tropical sun. The association was quite simple: the Marines were shown as military experts in the tropics, always ready to serve wherever US diplomacy needed support. The film *The Peacemakers*<sup>4</sup> also contributed to the promotion of the Corps. In this way US propaganda tried to play down the stereotypical perception of the Marines as colonial soldiers, whilst at the same time explaining to the citizens the country’s political and military involvement in Latin America. The fact that Marines were usually the first to join the fighting created their legend as fighters, so slogans like *The First to Fight or If You Want to Fight! Join Marines*<sup>5</sup> appeared on posters which encouraged enrollment.

Once the United States entered the First World War in April 1917 Commandant of Corps George Barnett wanted to push for a Marine combat role with the Army and told the Congress, “I do not want the Marine Corps to be considered a police force”. In regular war on the battlefields of France the Marines confirmed his battle qualities. The Germans were shocked by the ferocity of the Marines who won the field by courage and discipline. German intelligence reported following the battle: “They consider their membership in the Marine Corps to be something of an honor. They proudly resent any attempts to place their regiments on a par with other infantry regiments” (T.W. Smith). The Germans nicknamed them *teufelhunden* (devil dogs).

Until the mid-1930s, i.e. the announcement of a good neighbourhood policy by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the Corps was something like a quick response force; it received the best state-of-the-art equipment and other technological novelties. If we add that the Marines were the best trained, equipped and well paid units of the US Army, there is no surprise that the legend of its elite status spread quickly and has survived to this day.

The specialty of the Marines was the show of power in military operations. There were more of them than interventions as such and they were usually quite successful. The role of the Marines as ‘bogey-men’ is best illustrated by Richard Harding Davis in his short story *Soldiers of Fortune*:

[...] Try to break concession, try it. It was made by one Government to a body of honest, decent business men, with a Government of their own back of them, and if you interfere with our conceded rights to work those mines, I’ll have a man-of-war down here with

<sup>4</sup> Marine Corps Publicity Bureau, 1917, USA.

<sup>5</sup> Recruitment poster by Christy, H. Chandler, *If You Want To Fight! Join The Marines* (1915).

paint on her hull, and she'll blow you and your little republic back up there into the mountains... I'm sorry I had to make a gallery play of that sort, but it was the only way to make that sort of man understand (qtd. in Schmidt 28-29).

In 1935, one of the most accomplished senior generals of the *Marines*, Smedley D. Butler, a veteran of numerous interventions in Central America, the Caribbean and China, concluded with disarming sincerity that his service in the Marines was at the service of dollar diplomacy:

I spent 33 years and four months in active military service and during that period I spent most of my time as a high class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. I helped purify Nicaragua for the International Banking House of Brown Brothers in 1902-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for the American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras right for the American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went on its way unmolested. Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents (Langley 217).

The operations of marine forces in the Pacific during the Second World War form a separate chapter in their history. The Corps developed at that time into the size of an army, and at the end of the war counted six divisions which were running operations similar to regular armed forces, participating in large-scale military operations. The Corps' landing operation on Iwo Jima became legendary and became a part of US history. Losses of three fighting divisions of the Marine Corps reached 30% of its regular members, whilst in six storm battalions as much as 75%. In total, 23,000 US soldiers were killed or injured during the five weeks of fighting on Iwo Jima, i.e. one-third of the landing forces (Dunnigan, Nofi 182-185).

The bloody fighting at Iwo Jima was captured on a photograph made on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, 1945 by Joe Rosenthal, an Associated Press photographer. The photo shows six Marines raising the US flag on top of Mt Suribachi (three of the soldiers died during further fighting on the island). That picture became a symbol of the war in the Pacific and was the model for Felix DeWeldon's famous monument on the banks of the Potomac around Arlington cemetery and unveiled on 10<sup>th</sup> November of 1954 on the 179<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Marine Corps.

In 1947, the US Congress passed the *National Security Act*, on the basis of which the Marine Corps received the status of armed forces within the Navy Department and the task to provide land and air forces for the fleet (Millis, Mansfield, and Stein 176). The *Douglas - Mansfield Act* of 1952 provided that the Marine Corps could count no less than three battle divisions and three air sections whilst the Corps commandant should have an equal rank to members of the Joint Chiefs of *Staff*. According to the new doctrine, the Marine Air-Ground Task Force - MAGTF was created. The idea was to integrate land, air and logistic sub-units under one Marine Corps unit. A new doctrine and tactics were developed. This situation has continued for over fifty years (Linn, Neimeyer 50; Clancy 16, 18-19; *U.S. Marines Corps: Concept + Programs* 5-6).

The Marine Corps is basically the fourth type of US armed forces, next to aircraft, land forces and the Navy. The corps is accountable to the Navy Secretary, but it is under the command of the USMC commandant, who is a member of the Joint Heads of Staff, next to commandants of other types of forces. The Corps is a first line unit. Its structure includes three infantry divisions and three air sections, and a total of 184,000 soldiers. In addition, there is one reserve division and one air wing, totalling 36,000 people (*Active Duty Military Strength Report*).

The Marine Corps is not only the world's largest rapid deployment force,<sup>6</sup> but also the most universal type of armed forces, with their own tactics based on decades of experience and are well acquainted with new challenges and technologies. The Marines are not only excellent soldiers prepared for heavy battle on the first line, not only well trained for logistics tasks, but they have also been trained in peacemaking actions and are experts in small wars and the training of local armed forces. Thanks to their versatility and the wide array of means they are able to use to execute tasks which have been entrusted to them, marines have been a perfect instrument of foreign policy for over a hundred years.

Currently, the Marines account for 25% of the total US land forces, so the Corps is involved in all larger army operations. The Marines are the first to appear in areas of planned military operations, secure the area and prepare the logistics for the deployment of mainland forces. This was the case of the Restore Hope humanitarian operation of the United States in Somalia in 1992, when TV cameras recorded the landing of the Corps soldiers on the beaches of Mogadishu or, in 1990, during the Desert Shield operation when Marines protected the transport of allied forces to Saudi Arabia. The Corps was also famous for fighting in the most difficult area of occupied Iraq after the Second Persian Gulf War – the Sunnite Triangle.

Statistical data best shows why the Marines are such an important instrument of US foreign policy. Currently, around 290,000 US soldiers serve abroad, i.e. 21% of US armed forces. The Marine Corps account for 13% of total armed forces and 70% of them serve abroad. The cost of maintaining the Corps is 6% of the Pentagon's budget, whilst the forces constitute more than 40% of US armed forces actively involved in international operations (*U.S. Marines Concepts 211; Baseline facts about the Foreign Service*).

The Marine Corps also provides *Marines Security Guards* (MSG) to the Department of State. They serve under the command of non-commissioned officers and are deployed to most countries around the world. The tradition of close cooperation between the Marine Corps and US diplomatic services has continued almost from the very beginning of the Corps. Their scope of operation includes being sent to protect US diplomatic posts in Latin America and Asia. However, only after the Second World War was a legislative framework for this service established. *The Foreign Service Act* of 1946 provides that, if the Secretary of State so demands, the request of the Secretary of the Navy is authorised to assign duties and draft

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<sup>6</sup> It needs to be mentioned that the US Marines are not the only unit which has played the role of a "handy tool" of its country's diplomacy. In Great Britain this role was played by foreign units at the British service; in France it was the Foreign Legion. However, today there are not many colonial British forces left, whilst the Foreign Legion numbers less than 7,500 soldiers and officers, i.e. the force of three Marine battalions.

individuals serving on the Navy and Marines for the needs of the US foreign service (Plischke 470-471).

When, in 1948 the US Consul to Jerusalem, General T. C. Wasson was shot by a sniper, his successor asked the Department of State for a unit of Marines to protect him. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of July of the same year 12 Marines received the order to protect the diplomatic post in Jerusalem. In October thirty more Marines were included (Vasgerdsian 23).

In the aftermath of those events, an agreement was signed between the Department of State and the Marine Corps, still in 1948. Pursuant to that agreement, the Marines were to serve to protect US diplomatic posts. This task was assigned to Marines not only to ensure the security of US diplomatic staff. Until then, US representations abroad had hired security guards among local people. With the Cold War reality came the struggle among intelligence services who could not be trusted so diplomatic posts needed more security in this context. The memorandum of 17<sup>th</sup> November 1947, issued by the Department of State, pointed at the numerous attempts made by foreign intelligence services at infiltrating US posts. On 15<sup>th</sup> December, 83 Marines were sent to the *Foreign Service Institute* for ten-day training. In early 1948, President Truman authorised the Secretary of the Navy to assign 300 marines who would serve as security for diplomatic posts. Initially, the Marines were assigned to the offices of naval *attachés* of embassies. In addition to Jerusalem, the first foreign posts to which the Marines were sent for protection in 1948 were Havana in Cuba, Cairo in Egypt and Seoul in South Korea. Then came consulates in Tripoli, Libya and Nicosia, Cyprus (“Posting of US marines as Chancery guards” in *Confidential General and Confidential Original Correspondence*; Vasgerdsian 23-25).

Until December 1953, 675 Marines had been trained in providing security for foreign service. In November 1954 the Marine Security Guard School opened in Arlington, Virginia. In January 1967, the Marine Security Guard Battalion was established. Since then, MSGs serve in small units which number from 6 to 35 soldiers. They usually serve under the command of a sergeant-major. In addition to safeguarding diplomatic posts, they also participate in missions abroad and protect conventions and delegations organized by American institutions. At the MSGS, soldiers obtain special training to prepare for terrorist attacks or riots and to be ready for a swift evacuation of a diplomatic post. The Department of State develops the training curriculum for over a thousand carefully selected Marines to serve at diplomatic posts, but the training is provided by the Corps. Small guard units are recruited from among the Marines who show adequate psychological predispositions, excellent shooters and fighters in hand-to-hand combat. They are usually armed with light weapons: guns and machine guns. The MSG is responsible for the security of the personnel and for protecting secret documents (Barlett 19-23; Estes 80; King 51-53).

In the embassy, Marine Security Guards report directly to the Regional Security Officer - RSO. This is the only such case in the US Army when an army unit reports to a civilian (of course, except the President of the US, who, by virtue of the Constitution is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces). RSOs are foreign service officers at the Department of State. Their duty is to ensure the security of US diplomatic posts all over the world. Obviously, providing basic security of the embassy is primarily the duty of the host country. However, when their protection

fails, Marine Guards are expected to defend the post until rescue comes or at least until the embassy staff destroys secret documents (*The Department of State and U.S. Marines*).

In their capacity as aid to the Department of State, the Marine Security Guards protect US citizens and US interests abroad, which puts them on the spotlight of public interest. Whenever something important happens and US diplomatic posts appear on the news, one can always see Marines guarding the posts. Throughout the last twenty years about 15,000 soldiers have served in the battalion of Marines Security Guards. As of today, the U.S. Department of State Foreign Service keeps Guards at its diplomatic posts in 115 countries all over the world (Vasgerdsian 37).

An important element of the Corps' reputation is their soldiers' loyalty to their superiors. One example of this was the case of Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, an officer of the Marines interrogated by Congress in relation to the Iran-Contras affair, which saw light in 1987. The officer confirmed his reputation which typical representatives of the Corps enjoy. He was a brave, committed and loyal soldier, with numerous distinctions awarded for his service during the Vietnam War and the intervention in Grenada. The White House regarded him highly as a man who could always "bring matters to an end" like no one else (Bush, Gold 254-255). At the hearing before the Senate Commission inquiry he did not give any testimony that would incriminate President Reagan, though the President's active involvement in the operation was no secret to anybody. North's interrogation was broadcasted on TV, which was also echoed in the press, strengthening the reputation of Marine officers as men of principle who would never betray official secrets or their superiors, even under pain of imprisonment.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that the Marines serve close to the President certainly contributes to their popularity. The marines of helicopter squadron HMX-1 have the honor and responsibility of providing short-range air lift for the President of the United States. The orchestra that plays during official ceremonies at the White House is also a part of the Corps. The President's Own Marine Band's mission performs for the President of the United States and the Commandant of the Marine Corps. The Marine Band is America's oldest continuously active professional musical organization. Today, "The President's Own" is celebrated for its role at the White House and its dynamic public performances, which total more than 500 annually. At the request of Mrs. Kennedy, the Marine Band led the funeral procession of the assassinated president on November 25, 1963.

Marines continue to be an instrument of US intervention and are employed as an instrument of US foreign policy when the situation so requires. However, such intervention is not always needed, sometimes a veiled threat that the Marines might be used is enough to achieve political goals. Such activities are known as *Amphibious Demonstration* and consist of fake maneuvers of assault troops but the landing never actually happens. Mobility, excellent training and readiness for action at any moment and at practically any location across the globe to accomplish the goals of US foreign policy are invariable assets of the marines in the eyes of politicians. But

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<sup>7</sup> In 1989 Oliver North was sentenced to three years in prison (suspended sentence); many believe that he was just a scapegoat for top-level politicians and his conduct during the trial was a show of loyalty and patriotism.

the future of the marines depends on whether they will continue to be a strong argument in crisis situations, whether it be grave regional crises or natural disasters. The Marines are flexible and operate following the motto "set a task, I will find a solution". Currently, they are considered the world's most versatile force and, jointly with the Navy represent a huge potential. The Marines believe themselves to be superior to other soldiers, but do the Marines actually fight better than other soldiers? Rivals argue it is not so much their ability to fight—though that's never been a question—but that the Marines are simply masters of the art of public relations (T.W. Smith). President Harry Truman once stated that the Marines "have a propaganda machine that is almost equal to Stalin's" ("Truman to McDonough" in *Public Papers of the Presidents, Harry S. Truman 1945-1953*).

The US Marine Corps is one of the most recognizable combat forces worldwide, a flagship US armed force. Their popularity manifests itself in the fact that they are frequent heroes of press releases, books and films. Almost everybody is familiar with the following film productions: *Born on the Fourth of July*,<sup>8</sup> *Taxi Driver*,<sup>9</sup> *Men of Honor*,<sup>10</sup> *The Godfather*<sup>11</sup> and *Independence Day*<sup>12</sup> where Marines were leading characters, not to mention war movies. In *The Godfather* Michael Corleone (Al Pacino), returning wounded from the war in the Pacific, turns up at his sister's wedding dressed in the uniform of the Marines and decorated with the Silver Star and Purple Heart for bravery. In *Taxi Driver*, ex-Marine Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) decides to challenge the evil he sees working as the driver of a night taxi in New York. Next to movies which show the Marines in a bright light, there are also productions which show them as a blind, unthinking instrument of war, like e.g. *Full Metal Jacket*<sup>13</sup> or *Jarhead*<sup>14</sup>. In the latter, the main character becomes a friend of a soldier for whom being a Marine is the essence and the meaning of life. It shows a psychological mechanism: the Corps' pride – the ethics of this elite armed force – attracts people who often cannot cope with the burdens of everyday life.

Recent years have seen the production of famous films in which the Corps soldiers have been lead characters. The best known of them are *Flags of Our Fathers*,<sup>15</sup> *Letters from Iwo Jima*<sup>16</sup> and *Generation Kill*.<sup>17</sup>

Until the year 2000, 523 feature-length films had been made in which marines were leading characters or played supporting roles. If TV series and documentaries are also counted the number of productions reaches 1,158. The Marine Corps has been also a subject of a great number of books, both fiction and nonfiction. This bibliography catalogs more than 2000 nonfiction books and just over 500 novels that deal significantly with the Marines or the Corps (Hemenez). All that has made the *marines* icons of American culture, next to Native Americans and cowboys.

<sup>8</sup> *Born on the Fourth of July*, 1989, Universal.

<sup>9</sup> *Taxi Driver*, 1976, Columbia.

<sup>10</sup> *Men of Honor*, 2000, Fox 2000.

<sup>11</sup> *The Godfather*, 1972, Paramount; *The Godfather Part II*, 1974, Paramount.

<sup>12</sup> *Independence Day*, 1995, 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>13</sup> *Full Metal Jacket*, 1987, Warner Bros. Pictures.

<sup>14</sup> *Jarhead*, 2005, Universal Pictures.

<sup>15</sup> *Flags of Our Fathers*, 2006, Dreamworks Pictures.

<sup>16</sup> *Letters from Iwo Jima*, 2006, Warner Bros. Pictures.

<sup>17</sup> *Generation Kill*, 2008, a seven-episode series produced by HBO.

Currently, the situation of the Marine Corps has changed. The wars waged by the US in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused the Marines, who are the first to be sent to fight, to not be very popular. The Corps have problems with volunteers and recruitment standards have been lowered. The authorities have also tried to show a picture of marines that is different to the one shown in the media. The Marines are to be seen not as aggressive musclemen, blind instruments of war, but as an elite company of soldiers, fully aware of the need to defend American values. It is well pictured in recruitment posters: Nobody likes to fight but someone has to know how. *We are looking for a Few Good Men*.

In his introduction to the publications which saw print on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Corps establishment, a retired Commandant of the USMC, General Carl E. Mundy Jr. wrote the following words which best represent how soldiers and officers of this formation want to be seen:

To be a United States Marine requires more than mastery of the skills and techniques of soldiering... Being a Marine is a state of mind that comes from an imbedded belief that he or she is, in fact, unique, a cut above. A Marine is, most of all, part of an organization that demands a difference – and delivers excellence beyond others in all it is and does. This is The Corps, the strongest brotherhood in the world (Mundy 15).

The role of the Marines as a part of the fabric of American myth is best described by one of America's most esteemed military journalists and a Pulitzer Prize winner, Thomas E. Ricks, in his book *Making the Corps* (1997). According to Ricks the United States Marine Corps, with its fiercely proud tradition of excellence in combat, its hal-lowed rituals, and its unbending code of honor, leave so deep and permanent mark on its members like no other group in America.

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