

# **“That most useful body of men”: the Operational Doctrine and Identity of the British Marine Corps, 1755-1802**

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## **Abstract**

The Corps of Marines 1755-1802 (after 1802, Royal Marines) was the smallest of the three military services of the late eighteenth century British Armed Nation. Because of this, their history has largely been marginalised - or if dealt with, only in broad three hundred year studies. However, their importance has been largely underestimated. With the rise in the late eighteenth century of a more coherent 'Blue-Water Strategy', classified later by some historians as a uniquely 'British Way in Warfare', there was a need to have an operational organisation from which to implement Britain's grand strategy. The two other contemporary military organizations (Army and Navy) were too large, had internal resistance to, or simply had one-dimensional geographic identification which prevented the full pure operational implementation of British amphibious power. With the dawn of the Seven Years War the government gave this operational priority to the Navy, which began in earnest with the formation of the British Marine Corps. The Navy, and Marines, were able to do this by constructing an operational doctrine and identity for its new Marine Corps. With the forty-seven year construction of its operational doctrine and identity, the Marines not only assisted in the implementation of British grand strategy, but also were pivotal in the protection of the empire.

This dissertation is separated into two distinct parts. The first part outlines the skeleton of the Marines; their past formations, administration and manpower construct. The second part outlines the trials and tribulations of construction and institutionalisation of the Marine Corps within the British nation of the late-eighteenth century. This part reveals the non-combat usage, operational development and imperial rapid reaction force aspects of the Marines. Marines were to carry out many protection and security related duties on land and at sea. Because of this they were given direct access to weapons which in the unfortunate event of mutiny might be used against the men. Naval and amphibious combat were the main justifications for why the Marine Corps existed to begin with. Marines were to develop their own special 'targeted' suppression fire and a reliance on the bayonet for both of these operations. Importantly Empire; its maintenance, expansion, and protection was an essential element of the Marines existence. Marines were to become an imperial rapid reaction force that could be sent anywhere a naval ship was and used to suppress disorders. Identity was the tool of three powers (Public, Admiralty and Marine Corps) in their construction of this body of men. Marines' identity allowed them to be relied upon for a multitude of duties, including the basic protection of order on ship. By understanding all of these areas not only will it expand historical scholarship on how the British state constructed and implemented its policy decisions, but also how an organisation creates and validates its own purpose of existence.

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## **Note on Terms and Acknowledgements**

The Corps of Marines and Marine Corps were terms of contemporary usage for the British Marines of this period. I have therefore used these terms throughout my paper to refer to the British Marines exclusively; all other countries have their names before their service (i.e. US Marine Corps or Dutch Marines). As for capitalisation and lower case I have always capitalised Corps or Division unless it is directly inappropriate. Marines are to be capitalised when I am referring to them as the institution or the term of descriptive (i.e. the Marines or Marine officers). When the discussion changes to the marines themselves as men it shall be kept in a lower case. Finally, I have maintained the original authors' capitalisation practices when it comes to all direct quotes.

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