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THE CONFEDERATE MARINE CORPS: THEY ALSO SERVED

By
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The study of the Civil War has been approached from nearly every conceivable angle, however, the distinguished service rendered by both the United States and Confederate States Marine Corps was essentially overlooked. This is particularly true of the Confederate Marine Corps.

The Confederate Marine Corps was established in the spring of 1861 and was authorized to have a maximum complement of 990 officers and enlisted men. The Corps was plagued by recruiting difficulties throughout the war and reached its largest point in October of 1864 when there were 571 Marines at arms. The Marine Corps was commanded by Col. Lloyd James Beall. In 1862, the Marines established a base at Drewry's Bluff Virginia and named it Camp Beall.

The Confederate Marine Corps duties included policing the Confederate Naval Bases. Nearly every gunboat, ironclad, and commerce raider had a detachment of Marines on board to serve as guards, boarding parties and as artillery gunners. The Marines developed a reputation as expert gunners. Marines served with distinction in the naval battles of Port Royal, Hampton Roads, Mobile Bay, and Fort Fisher.

The Confederate Marines were also called upon for special service which in two instances involved Missourians. In February of 1863, the Naval Department authorized a plan to train Army, Navy, and Marine units to destroy ironclads by boarding them. This was in anticipation of a Union attack of Charleston which occurred in April of 1863. The Marine unit was commanded by Captain Thomas S. Wilson of Missouri. The attack was repulsed and the Marines were not called into service.

Likewise, in July of 1864, General Robert E. Lee devised a plan where a battalion of Marines were to slip through the naval blockade and make a amphibious landing at Point Lookout above Washington D.C. to free the Confederate Prisoners of War there. This was to be done in support of General Jubal Early's raid on Washington. The force was led again by Thomas S. Wilson and included 2nd Lt. Henry H. McCune, also of Missouri. The ships carrying the Marines were called back and the mission aborted due to perceived leaks regarding their activities.

Another interesting footnote of history involves Confederate Marine Sgt. George Stephenson of the

infamous commerce raider *CSS Sumter*. After a long career, the *CSS Sumter* was abandoned at Gilbralter and a small force was left behind including a Marine Guard commanded by Sgt. Stephenson. The commanding officer, Midshipman Williams Andrews, was killed in October 1862 by a seaman and Sgt. Stephenson became the only Marine Federal or Confederate to command a ship of war during the Civil War.

As the fortunes of the Confederacy grew dark in the spring of 1865, Navy and Marines personnel were brought to Drewry's Bluff and formed into fighting units such as Tucker's Naval Battalion which fought with distinction at the battle of Saylor's Creek. In addition, when Robert E. Lee surrendered his army at Appomattox Court House, it included four Marine officers and 21 enlisted Marines.

Source:

Sullivan, D.M. *The United States Marine Corps in the Civil War- The First Year*.

Note:
Kevin Gallen is Chairman of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources Advisory Committee on Civil War Markers and a member of the William T. Sherman/Billy Yank Camp 65, Department of Missouri, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War.