

Below: The WW II battle for Iwo Jima and Mount Suribachi is considered a keystone event in the illustrious history of the Corps.

Right: The flag raising atop Suribachi is immortalized by Felix de Weldon's sculpture of the Marine Corps War Memorial in Arlington, Va. After the battle in early 1945, U.S. Navy Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz said of the men in the Third, Fourth and Fifth Marine Divisions: "Among the Americans serving on Iwo island, uncommon valor was a common virtue."



SGT LOU LOWERY, USMC

Intrigue & Skullduggery:

Little Men's Chowder & Marching Society

Part II
By R.R. Keene

The American blood that was spilled on the World War II battlefields of Europe and the Pacific had not yet dried when plots were hatched in the halls of the nation's Capitol to bring the Marine Corps into tow and gut its combat capabilities. Enter a deceptively inauspicious band of Marine officers willing to risk everything for their Corps.

"The raising of that flag on Suribachi means a Marine Corps for the next 500 years," said Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal to Lieutenant General Holland M. "Howlin' Mad" Smith, in the command ship USS *Mount Olympus* (AGC-8) off the island of Iwo Jima the morning of Feb. 23, 1945. The grandfatherly looking Smith, a tenacious battlefield commander, was not such a romanticist, and when Forrestal was out of hearing range, said, "When the war is over and money is short, they will be after the Marines again, and a dozen Iwo Jimas would make no difference."

When the Japanese signed surrender documents aboard USS



James V. Forrestal

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Missouri (BB-63) in Tokyo Bay, Sept. 2, 1945, the Marine Corps and its sister services faced a massive task of downsizing their numbers and reorganizing.

"To demobilize a Corps of [500,000] officers and men and 'get the boys home' under pressure of a wave of home-town hysteria that temporarily crippled our foreign policy and is embarrassing to remember," writes historian Colonel Robert Debs Heinl Jr., in "Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps, 1775-1962," Congress authorized 107,000 officers and men as the peacetime strength of the Corps in order "to confront ill-defined but disturbing pressures for extensive reorganization of the defense establishment, which boded nothing but trouble for the Marine Corps."

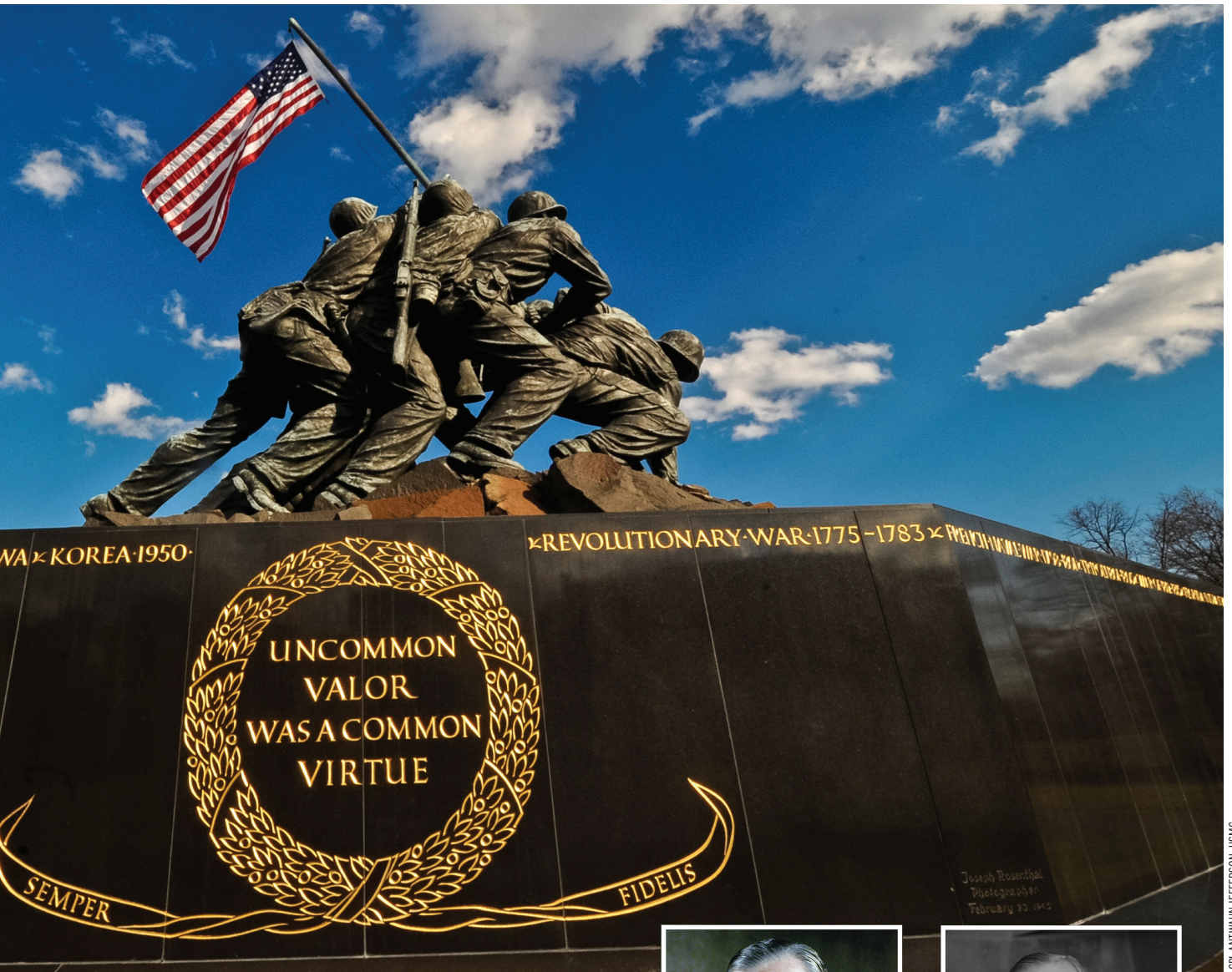
Heinl asserts that the authorization also was "to respond professionally to the chorus of doubts and unanswered questions inspired by the advent of the atom bomb, especially prophecies that 'there would never be another amphibious landing.'" The latter was a swipe at the Corps by Army General Omar N. Bradley.

The efforts to reduce the Marine Corps started as far back as



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"When the war is over and money is short, they will be after the Marines again, and a dozen Iwo Jimas would make no difference."—LtGen Holland M. "Howlin' Mad" Smith



LCPL ANTHONY JEFFERSON, USMC

1943 while the country was at war. In November of that year, GEN George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, signed off on a memorandum that proposed the Air Corps be separated from the Army and that the Armed Services be unified under the Department of War, with a single chief of staff and an Armed Forces general staff.

By 1945 the Army plan was confidently presented to Congress by War Department spokesman Army Brigadier General J. Lawton “Lightning Joe” Collins.

While the Collins plan was being debated on Capitol Hill, a debate with far more direct bearing on the Corps was taking shape, according to Heinl. Initially, GEN Marshall; the Commanding General, Army Air Forces, Gen Carl A. “Tooeey” Spaatz; and Army Chief of Staff GEN Dwight D. Eisenhower “saw the overweening ambition inherent to their plan,” writes Robert Coram in “Brute: The Life of Victor Krulak, U.S. Marine,” “because when they codified their ideas into a series of papers known as the JCS 1478 papers, the papers, in arbitrary and unnecessary classification, were stamped ‘TOP SECRET,’ ” and closely held.

When Krulak saw the plan, he said it “would isolate the president, as commander in chief, from broad military advice. A single secretary would counsel the president supplanting both the civilian secretaries of the military departments and chiefs of the services. The new defense secretary would have



DDO

GEN George C. Marshall



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President Harry S. Truman



USAF

Gen Carl A. “Tooeey” Spaatz



USA

**General of the Army
Dwight D. Eisenhower**

the responsibility of formulating a single military budget, which the service chiefs would be called upon to defend, but which they would not have had a hand in creating.” Navy Secretary Forrestal believed the plan was “fundamentally against the spirit and genius of American institutions.” Naval officers gasped in the realization that it “meant the end of the naval establishment and all it had stood for.”

Gen Spaatz and GEN Eisenhower outlined the War Department’s plan for the Corps. The Marines would fight “only in minor shore combat operations in which the Navy alone is interested.” Their size would be limited to “lightly armed units, no larger than a regiment, to protect U.S. interests ashore in foreign countries, and to provide interior guard of naval ships and shore establishments.” The total strength of the Corps would be limited to 60,000 with no expansion in time of war; the Marine Corps Reserve would be abolished. Marine units would be held below the size requiring the combining of arms.

Marine aviation would be merged into what might be left of naval aviation or be transferred outright to the Air Force. Marines were to be restricted to the “waterborne aspects of amphibious operations” (duty as landing craft crews and beach labor parties).

Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Chief of Naval Operations, read the proposal, fumed and said it was no more than an effort “to eliminate the Marine Corps as an effective combat force.”

The 18th Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen Alexander A. Vandegrift, wrote to retired LtGen Thomas Holcomb (the 17th CMC), “The Army is back on the job in full force trying to absorb the Navy and with it the Marine Corps.” The War Department was unfazed. According to Heinl: “A Senate bill (S.2044) was introduced ... that included authority that would permit the new Secretary of Defense to prescribe by fiat, without congressional check, the roles and missions of the Armed Services. This would remove the Marine Corps from the protection of Congress where it had stood since 1798 and would enable accomplishment of the War Department program by the stroke of a staff officer’s pen.”

Sensing victory, the rhetoric got nasty. Army BG Frank Armstrong, a spokesman for the War Department, said during a speech, “As for the Marines, you know what Marines are. They are a small, fouled-up Army talking Navy lingo. We are going to put those Marines in the regular Army and make efficient soldiers out of them.”

Enter the Little Men’s Chowder & Marching Society. The Chowder Society was a group of officers under LtGen Merrill B. Twining who were the intellectual impetus behind the Corps’ efforts to remain a separate service.

It got its name from a popular comic of the day, “Barnaby.”

The title character was short and bore a resemblance to then-Col “Brute” Krulak, one of the principals in the Twining effort. Barnaby had a fairy godfather named Jackeen O’Malley, and he belonged to a club called the “Elves, Leprechauns, Gnomes and Little Men’s Chowder & Marching Society.” Col James D. Kerr hung a copy of the cartoon on Krulak’s office in Quantico, Va., with Little Men’s Chowder & Marching Society underlined and Barnaby labeled “Krulak.”

In later years, Twining would write to Marine Corps historian Benis M. Frank, “I knew ... that a government official appointed by the President must act in accordance with the precepts emanating from the White House. Any organized opposition to its dictates is in effect conspiratorial except, and then only arguably, when he is responding to questioning by the legislative branch.

“The Chowder Society conducted its operation with that thought uppermost in order to protect General Vandegrift, from a single moment of sorrow emanating from our efforts. We deliberately, and at my insistence, operated on a totally collegial basis. In other words, we operated without formal organization.”

The Navy, however, organized and was, according to Twining, “soon involved in scandal and detection. They destroyed themselves. We were also constantly under scrutiny, but our method of operation enabled us to avoid detection in *flagrante delicto* [being caught in the act].”

Who were these “Little Men”? The senior was LtGen Twining, a Naval Academy graduate and infantry officer with a background in law. He had helped prepare and execute plans for the Guadalcanal campaign. He also was the nephew of RADM Nathan C. Twining and brother of Air Force Gen Nathan F. Twining.

BGen Gerald C. Thomas, another veteran of Guadalcanal, was also a highly decorated and experienced combat veteran of WW I, Haiti and China. He was smart enough to have taught intelligence and history at Marine Corps Schools Quantico, and, according to Krulak, had “solid grounding in the origins of the Corps.” He “could see through a problem with lightning speed.” He was a man “whose solutions were practical and strong, and whose ability to express himself in clear and persuasive terms was legend.” When briefed on the Army’s unification plan, he described it to Krulak as “pure militarism in the German image and a direct threat to the Corps.”

Others in the group included BGen Merritt A. “Red Mike” Edson, leader of Edson’s Raiders and recipient of the Medal of Honor on Guadalcanal; Colonels Robert E. Hogaboom and James E. Kerr; Lieutenant Colonel James C. Murray, who, according to Krulak, “had an innovative brain, an agile pen, and a great capacity for work”; and LtCol James D. Hittle, “an articulate writer and a tireless lobbyist whose Capitol Hill contacts were critical.” Others



Gen Alexander A. Vandegrift, 18th CMC



LtGen Gerald C. Thomas



MajGen Merritt A. “Red Mike” Edson



LtGen Merrill B. Twining

were Lieutenant Colonels DeWolf Schatzel, Samuel R. Shaw, Robert D. Heintz and Edward H. Hurst, Major Jonas M. Platt and reserve officers Russell Blandford (who later retired as a major general), Arthur Hansen and William McCahill.

Robert Coram, in "Brute," singled out one particular member of the Chowder Society—LtCol Lyford Hutchins, USMCR, a veteran of WW II, and later, Korea and Vietnam. Coram described him as "a shadowy figure who sometimes disappeared for days on end. When he reappeared, he would empty a briefcase onto Krulak's desk, and out would tumble documents so sensitive that Krulak would wonder whether they had been purloined. It was Hutchins who obtained a copy of the JCS 1478 papers that gave Krulak the blueprint for Army unification."

The Chowder Society was anything but a team. Krulak said, "There were times when we were more like a log floating downstream with a thousand ants on it—each of them convinced that he was steering. At best, we were a group of individuals who had a reasonable understanding of the problem and shared similar goals."

Caution was the order of the day. "There was no reason to treat [the 1478 document] with that high degree of sensitivity but, so long as it was thus classified, we would be unable to use the 1478 papers to show what the other services were planning for the Marines' future," according to Krulak. Nonetheless, they had decided to confront the Army head on. Krulak said the unification debate was in reality a "cat fight where the stakes are the preservation of the existing U.S. military structure as well as the survival of the Marine Corps as a national institution." Gen Vandegrift had been called to testify before the Senate Naval Affairs Committee. Twining and Krulak had worked up a response that Twining insisted be tough and truthful. It would be "clear and unequivocal" and would focus on Army motivation.

The Commandant gained everyone's full attention by saying the unification bill was fundamentally flawed, and the Army was deliberately seeking to usurp congressional authority. He then added: "This bill gives the War Department a free hand in accomplishing its expressed desire to reduce the Marine Corps to a position of military insignificance."

He emphasized a crucial point that placed a burden on Congress. "In its capacity as a balance wheel, the Congress has on five occasions since 1928 reflected the voice of the people in casting aside a motion that would damage or destroy the Marine Corps. Now I believe the cycle has repeated itself

and that the fate of the Marine Corps lies solely with the Congress.

"The Marine Corps thus believes it has earned this right—to have its future decided by the legislative body which created it—nothing more. ... The bended knee is not a tradition of our Corps. If the Marine as a fighting man has not made a case for himself after 170 years, he must go. But I think you will agree with me that he has earned the right to depart with dignity and honor, not by subjugation to the status of uselessness and servility planned for him by the War Department."

The secrecy cover was lifted off the Army's plan, and the Army was ridiculed by the media. President Truman was furious, according to Coram, but publicly held his tongue. Leaders of the Senate and the House said the Army bill would not pass if it meant stripping the Marine Corps of its historic functions. Privately, however, the president gave the Commandant "a brutal tongue-lashing."

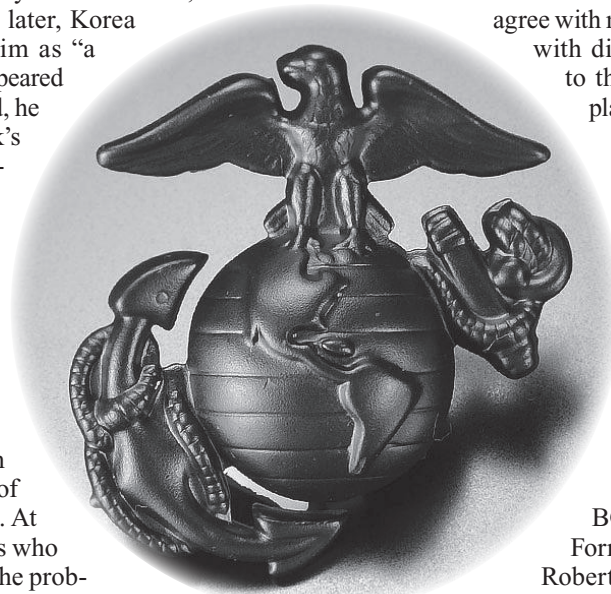
Accompanied by BGen Thomas and BGen Edson and Secretary of the Navy Forrestal, Gen Vandegrift, according to J. Robert Moskin, author of "The U.S. Marine Corps Story," went to see President Truman and "argued for a Congressional charter for the Corps. [GEN] Eisenhower, now the Army's Chief of Staff, opposed having 'two land armies' and recommended that the Marines be limited to units of regimental size. He told [Gen] Vandegrift that the Army dreaded the Corps' expansiveness ever since the publicity over Belleau Wood [in WW I]."

Vandegrift assured Eisenhower that the Corps had no ambition to be a second army and wanted to remain an amphibious partner with the Navy.

The battle, however, continued, but according to Twining, "The public began losing interest in our cause." Members of the Chowder Society marched into Congress "without any idea of what they were supposed to accomplish," but they talked the Corps' case to whoever would listen. Twining said, "Within 72 hours, President Truman was on the phone to Vandegrift—'Get those lieutenant colonels of yours off the hill.'"

For a long time, there was little doubt among military handicappers that BGen Edson, with his war record and record of service to the Corps, eventually would become Commandant of the Marine Corps. However, when he was ordered not to oppose unification in public, Edson retired to rouse support for the Marine position.

In an article titled "Power-Hungry Men in Uniform," he wrote that he disliked "an American replica of the Prussian general staff system." Immediately after his retirement, he said, "I am a



LtGen Robert E. Hogaboom



BGen James D. Hittle



Col DeWolf Schatzel

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“On the evening that the National Security Act was passed, members of the Chowder Society met as a group for the first time. The meeting was at Krulak’s house where the officers celebrated the fact that America and their Corps had prevailed in a great battle.”—Robert Coram

military man and proud of it, but when we reach the point where the military are directing, rather than supporting our country’s policies, we are far along the road to losing what this country has always stood for. It was because of this trend of events that I finally reached the very difficult decision to resign.”

Twining later wrote, “Edson sacrificed himself by openly challenging the Army attempt. A selfless act but regrettable ... and we lost our greatest hope for the future.”

In “Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps,” author Allan R. Millett writes, “The 1949 hearings and press coverage of the interservice rivalry over roles and missions, however, stirred Corps champions in Congress, particularly Carl Vinson, the powerful chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. ... Vinson introduced legislation to curb the [Joint Chiefs of Staff] powers over roles and missions and to put the Commandant on the JCS. Similar proposals would also have set the Corps’ strength at 6 percent of America’s uniformed manpower and created an assistant secretary of the Navy to represent the Corps.

Such congressional advocates as Donald L. Jackson, Paul H. Douglas, Mike Mansfield, George A. Smathers (all [Marine veterans]), and ... Clare Hoffman filled the Congressional Record with pro-Marine testimonials and released the suspect JCS 1478 papers to public views. Fifty-five members of the House endorsed legislation protecting the Corps.”

Despite the opposition of the second Secretary of Defense, Louis A. Johnson, the Commandant sought a place on the Joint Chiefs of Staff for discussion of matters affecting the Marine Corps. Secretary Johnson “had little love for the Navy and none for the Marine Corps. Unopposed by a complaisant Secretary of the Navy [John L. Sullivan], he directed sharp cuts in Fleet Marine Force strength for fiscal years 1949 and 1950,” according to BGen Edwin H. Simmons, USMC (Ret) in his book, “The United States Marines, 1775-1975.”

“In a public relations gaffe of the first magnitude,” according to Millett, “President Truman himself handed Corps champions a new opportunity.” In response to a letter from Representative Gordon L. McDonough about legislation that would entitle the Corps to be fully recognized as a major branch of the Armed Forces, he wrote on Aug. 29, 1950: “The Marine Corps is the

Navy’s police force, and as long as I am president, that is what it will remain. They have a propaganda machine that is almost equal to Stalin’s.”

The media also received the letter, and the public’s response did not support the president’s position. Postal sacks stuffed with hostile letters made their way to the White House and what stung most were the unsolicited rebukes from citizenry, most of them from the Marine Corps family.

Less than a week later, the president apologized to the CMC. “I sincerely regret the unfortunate choice of language, which I used in my letter of Aug. 29 to Congressman McDonough concerning the Marine Corps,” wrote President Truman in a Sept. 6, 1950, letter to Gen Clifton B. Cates.

For all intents and purposes, the Corps’ fight for survival ended on July 26, 1947, when President Truman signed the National Security Act organizing the military under a single secretary of defense and establishing the Air Force as a separate arm. The Act was especially important to the Corps, according to Moskin, as it “formalized in law for the first time the Corps’ special amphibious function. The Corps was assigned the mission of seizing and defending advanced bases and engaging in land operations related to a naval campaign.” The Fleet Marine Force was retained and the Commandant also had a seat on the Joint Staff. “The Corps did, in fact, remain virtually a ‘second army’ with a manpower ceiling of 400,000.”

Coram writes: “On the evening that the National Security Act was passed, members of the Chowder Society met as a group for the first time. The meeting was at Krulak’s house where the officers celebrated the fact that America and their Corps had prevailed in a great battle. ... Almost everyone drank too much as they replayed various skirmishes of the long battle. Then the Chowder Society was dissolved.”

According to Krulak, President Truman, in his conversation with Gen Vandegrift had asked quizzically, “You Marines don’t trust anybody, do you?” Krulak noted, “The President was right.”

And he warned future generations of Marines, “I believe the triumph [in the 1947 National Security Act] was due to, more than anything else, the quality of apprehensive vigilance that has characterized the Corps since its birth.”



LtGen Victor H. “Brute” Krulak



Col Robert D. Heint



BGen E.H. Hurst



BGen Jonas M. Platt



LtCol Lyford Hutchins