

OUTPOST IN THE  
NORTH ATLANTIC:  
MARINES IN THE  
DEFENSE OF ICELAND

MARINES IN  
WORLD WAR II  
COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

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# Outpost in the North Atlantic: Marines in the Defense of Iceland

by Colonel James A. Donovan, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret)

**I**n the early spring of 1941, with the war in Europe a year and a half old, the recently formed 2d Marine Division trained for what observant Marines expected would be an amphibious war against the Japanese in the Pacific. The division was then stationed at Marine Corps Base, San Diego, and also at the newly opened Camp Elliott.

Field training for the 6th Marines and the other 2d Division regiments (2d and 8th Marines, infantry; 10th Marines, artillery) was conducted in the scrubby hills and arroyos of Camp Elliott where large wooden, yellow-painted, Navy-designed barracks housed the Marine companies and battalions at what is now Naval Air Station, Miramar. Some units were in nearby tent camps.

Unit training consisted of weapons schools, drills, and firing of individual and crew-served weapons. Small unit tactical exercises were run by companies, and there was a considerable number of long-distance hikes. The Marines had virtually no vehicles or motorized mobility, so nearly all movement was by foot. There were very few battalion or larger-unit field exercises. Night training was minimal.

In April, the 6th Marines' landing teams began a series of amphibious

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*On the cover: Marine sentry keeps a lonely vigil on the perimeter of one of the Marine camps established in 1941 amid the dramatic landscapes of Iceland. (Marine Corps Historical Collection)*

*At left: These Marines in fur-collared cold-weather gear stand on the chilly "Main Street" of their wooden-fronted and coke-and-coal-stove-heated Nissen hut encampment in Iceland. (Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 185054)*

training exercises embarked in a group of recently modified freight/passenger ships procured for the purpose. Ship-to-shore drills were held on San Clemente Island, west of San Diego, using the recently developed Landing Craft Personnel (LCP) or "Higgins Boat." This boat had no ramp in the bow, so the Marines had to roll over the gunwales to disembark. (The LCPR with a ramp at the bow was not widely available to Marines until after the landing on Guadalcanal in August 1942.)

The 6th Marines received a warning order in May 1941 for a possible move to the East Coast to join the 1st Marine Division for contingency operations related to the war in Europe. At the time, the regiment was not yet up to peacetime strength, so the call went out to both the 2d and 8th Marines for volunteers—both officers and enlisted Marines—to augment the 6th. There was no shortage of volunteers.

Colonel Leo D. "Dutch" Hermle, a much-decorated veteran of World War I, commanded the 6th Marines. For its move, the regiment was to be reinforced by the 2d Battalion, 10th Marines (with 12 75mm pack howitzers); Company A, 2d Tank Battalion, minus one platoon (with 12 light tanks); a parachute platoon; an anti-tank platoon; and the 1st Platoon, Company A, 2d Service Battalion. The regiment and the reinforcing units were brought up to a strength of 204 officers and 3,891 enlisted, Marine and Navy, following the arrival of 58 officers and 577 enlisted men from the other units of the division. The division ordered the reinforced regiment to take 10 units of fire for all weapons, gasoline, 30-days' rations, and other supplies.

On 31 May, the reinforced 6th Ma-

rines mounted out of San Diego with orders to report to the Commanding General, I Corps (Provisional), Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic Fleet. At that time, combat loading for an assault landing had not yet become as refined as it was to be later in the war. In any case, the regiment and its supporting units did not know where they were going or what their mission was to be, so the ships were loaded more for convenience than for combat. Higher headquarters kept adding items to be embarked, leading some companies to take everything in their camp supply sheds.

Most of the Marines embarking with the 6th believed that the force would go to the Caribbean region, so some officers packed summer service uniforms, dress whites, and summer and winter civilian dinner clothes, in addition to all their winter service uniforms. One credible rumor was that they were going to Martinique to guard an impounded Free French aircraft carrier against a potential German takeover. Still another rumor held the Azores as the objective.

In the early spring of 1941, the British had, in fact, expressed concern about the security of the Azores which, if taken by the Germans, would threaten both Portugal and the British supply lines into the Mediterranean Sea. British and American staff planners meeting in Washington had been making contingency plans for the growing likelihood of America's participation in the war. In such a case, the United States would relieve the British of responsibility for the defense of Iceland, among other things. While the U.S. Army was rapidly expanding, it appeared that Congressional support for the draft was wavering, which meant the Army could not

# Activation of the 2d Marine Division

Major General Clayton B. Vogel, its first commander, activated the 2d Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force (FMF), at a parade and review at the Marine Corps Base, San Diego, California, during a sunny Saturday afternoon of 1 February 1941.

The division consisted of the 2d, 6th, and 8th Marines infantry regiments; the 10th Marines, an artillery regiment; engineer, medical, service, and tank battalions; and transport, signal, chemical, and anti-aircraft machine gun companies.

For the parade, battalions were formed in battalion masses according to the new 1939 *Infantry Drill Regulations*. The front ranks were 12 files abreast. The parade uniform consisted of the steel helmet of the style worn in World War I, a cotton khaki shirt and field scarf (tie), winter service green trousers wrapped tightly into tan, blanched leggings, and polished chocolate brown-colored shoes. Officers wore green breeches and polished boots. Weapons and equipment were essentially the same as the Marines had in the First World War, 23 years earlier: the M1903 rifle and bayonet; the Browning automatic rifle (BAR); the .45-caliber M1911 pistol; cartridge belt; and combat pack. Web equipment was scrubbed and blanched to a light tan shade. Metal parts were painted dull black, and leather items spit-shined a dark brown.

Each battalion had 81mm mortars. This simple and dependable weapon with a range of more than 3,000 yards was an upgrade of the Stokes mortars fired in World War I. Battalions had 12 .30-caliber, water-cooled, Browning machine guns M1917A1 (plus 12 spares). This accurate, belt-fed gun was mounted upon a heavy steel tripod. The Marines had small, two-wheeled "Cole" carts, each pulled by two men, to transport these guns as well as the mortars. In 1941 the machine guns were all in the battalion machine gun company. The mortar platoon was assigned to the headquarters company. The headquarters and service company of each regiment had an antitank platoon with six of the new 37mm antitank guns.

During the winter of 1940-1941, the 2d Division's three direct support artillery battalions were in the 10th Marines. Each direct support battalion had three four-gun batteries. The howitzers could be broken down into man-portable parts for beach landings, or operations in mountainous terrain, or even packed on the backs of mules. The artillery had one-ton trucks as prime movers to tow the howitzers, but they also had ropes and harnesses for the Marines to put on and pull the howitzers from the beach inland to firing positions, if necessary, before the trucks were landed. That was the "old Corps' cannon cocker's" mobility.

*MajGen Clayton B. Vogel activates the 2d Marine Division on 1 February 1941.*



deploy units containing draftees overseas.

By late spring 1941, Britain's back was against the wall. Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill asked President Franklin D. Roosevelt to send American troops to Iceland to replace the British garrison there. The President agreed, provided the Icelanders invited an American occupation force to their island. Churchill, meanwhile, was having difficulty in securing the invitation and the reluctance of the Icelandic government to issue one very nearly upset an Anglo-American timetable already in process.

A large volcanic island on the edge of the Arctic Circle, Iceland was strategically located for the air and naval control of the North Atlantic "lifeline"



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 280-15-65

*Passing in review in the activation parade of the 2d Marine Division are trucks of the 10th Marines carrying twin .50-caliber water-cooled machine guns on anti-aircraft mounts of the type taken to Iceland by the 6th Marines later that year.*

## Life in the Prewar Marine Corps

**I**t was the practice to hold Friday afternoon regimental parades and reviews at the San Diego Marine Corps Base followed by liberty for the troops and "tea" at the Officers' Club. The regiments and support battalions rotated back and forth between the new Camp Elliott, 12 miles to the north of San Diego, and the base every three months. On Saturday nights the club had dinner and dancing to a band playing some of the great music of the 1930s. Officers wore suits and ties. Women wore cocktail dresses, hats, and gloves. There was no shortage of attractive Navy and Marine Corps daughters for the bachelors. Social habits were generally well mannered; an officer who

*It was the practice of the prewar Corps at San Diego to hold Friday afternoon parades. Here the 1st Battalion, 6th*

didn't behave himself socially quickly found himself in official trouble.

In the years prior to 1940 and war mobilization, most of the Marine Corps was unmarried. In the regular Corps, second lieutenants were not permitted to marry during their first two years of duty. The lower ranking enlisted men could not afford to be married. There were no family allowances for any but senior-ranking staff NCOs, and sergeants with seven or more years of service. Most sergeants were bachelors who lived in the barracks with their men. With the mobilization of Reserves, many married Marines of all ranks came on duty.

*Marines, commanded by LtCol Oliver P. Smith, marches past at the Recruit Depot before leaving for Iceland.*

National Archives Photo 127-G-515852





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 400753

*Lacking vehicles, a group of Marines and a Navy hospital corpsman, right, haul a heavily laden Cole cart up a steep hill during their unit tactical exercises at Camp Elliott, 12 miles north of San Diego and now Naval Air Station Miramar.*

between the British Isles and North America. In 1941, France having fallen, Britain alone faced Nazi Germany. Churchill knew that the survival of his nation depended upon support from the United States, and by no means could Iceland be allowed to fall into enemy hands.

At the end of May, the Joint Board of the Army and Navy, formed after the Spanish-American War to pre-

pare joint war plans, approved a contingency plan to land some 28,000 U.S. Army troops and Marines on the Azores under Marine Major General Holland M. Smith. The 1st Marine Division would provide most of the Marine component, but at that time the division was expanding and its regiments were still understrength. It was then decided to reinforce the division with a regiment

from the 2d Division and the task fell to the 6th Marines (Reinforced).

The ships carrying the 6th Marines consisted of three transports (APs). The 1st Battalion was in the USS *Fuller* (AP 14), the 2d Battalion in the USS *Heywood* (AP 12), and the 3d Battalion in the USS *William P. Biddle* (AP 15) with the regimental headquarters. Each transport's embarkation team included elements of the

**L**ieutenant General Leo D. Hermle, who died in January 1976, was born in Hastings, Nebraska, in 1890, and was graduated from the University of California in 1917 with bachelor of arts and doctor of jurisprudence degrees. He reported for active duty as a Marine second lieutenant in August 1917, and sailed for France in February 1918 with the Sixth Marine Regiment. He participated with the regiment in all of its major battles in France, and for his service he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal, the Silver Star with an Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of a second Silver Star, and the French Croix de Guerre with Palm and Diploma. He also was awarded the French Legion of Honor with the rank of Chevalier, and was cited twice in the General Orders of the 2d Division, American Expeditionary Forces. For five years after his return to the United States, he served as a legal officer at Marine Barracks, Mare Island, and in the office of the Judge Advocate

General of the Navy. During the interwar period, he had duty in the States as well as overseas. As commander of the 6th Marines, he took his regiment to Charleston, South Carolina, where it became the nucleus of the 1st Marine Brigade (Provisional), in June 1941, when it sailed for Iceland. Upon his return to Camp Elliott, California, in March 1942, Colonel Hermle became chief of staff of the 2d Marine Division and travelled with it when it was assigned to duty in the Pacific. Upon promotion to brigadier general, General Hermle became assistant division commander (ADC) of the 2d, and as such, participated with it in the assault of Tarawa. He returned to the West Coast to become ADC of the 5th Marine Division and landed with it in the invasion of Iwo Jima in February 1945. For his exploits, he received the Navy Cross. He was both deputy island commander and island commander of Guam, 1945-1946, and assumed command of the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, in

1946, where he remained until his retirement in 1949, after more than 32 years of active service. For having been specially commended for his performance of duty in combat, he was advanced to the rank of lieutenant general on the retired list. He was a professor of law at the University of San Diego for many years following retirement.



# Uniforms and Equipment

As the Marine Corps expanded with the mobilization of the Reserves, the Marines' dress blue uniforms were relegated to closets. Newly joined Reservists were not required to have dress uniforms, although many did.

Winter service "greens" were the formal dress as well as the cold weather field uniform, as worn in World War I. This uniform included the peaked barracks cap and the still-popular garrison (or "overseas" cap). The blouse was worn with khaki cotton shirt and matching "field scarf" tie. A brass "battle pin" held the pointed shirt collars in place. Most enlisted Marines washed, starched, and ironed their own khaki clothing.

Trousers were in the same green wool kersey material as the blouse and for officers a fine quality 20-ounce elastique material was standard. Officers also wore tailored riding breeches with leather puttees or riding boots, and they had fine cordovan leather Sam Browne belts with brass buckles. The enlisted men wore a wide cordovan leather "Peter Bain" belt with heavy buckle. Enlisted men's trousers had no rear pockets.

Enlisted Marines were issued high-top laced shoes. They took a fine spit-shine, but their soles were too thin for field service, so many Marines had them double-soled. Each Marine had two pair, one for field use and one for dress wear.

The regulation overcoat was heavy green wool, similar to the issue uniform, double-breasted and fitted. The officer's overcoat was custom tailored, fitted, and usually in a heavy beaver or elastique material. All uniform buttons were dark bronze. Other than for duty in North Chi-

na, these winter service uniforms generally had been replaced for field service by cotton khaki shirts and trousers of a kind which had been worn for some 40 years on Caribbean and "banana war" duties in Central America. For field training and combat duty, enlisted men added the high, tan canvas, laced leggings as worn in World War I, and long before, in the China and the Philippines campaigns at the turn of the century.

The most popular, typical, and colorful item, however, was the olive drab, felt field or "campaign" hat with wide brim and peaked top. It was the pride of all real "salty" Marines of the period. Its ancestry went back to the frontier U.S. cavalry in the late 19th century. Marines in the Fleet Marine Force battalions wore this hat with a special jaunty flair, and the Corps' emblem on the front was often greenish from the salt water sprayed on it during landing exercises. None of this uniform clothing was designed for or especially suitable for a wet-cold climate such as that of Iceland.

Another item of clothing worn during this period was the one-piece, dark blue denim coverall. To save the more expensive winter service greens and summer service khakis, the coveralls were worn on working parties, for range firing details, by prisoners, and for dirty field training. These coveralls were the ancestors of the wartime dusty-green color, cotton herringbone twill "utilities" which became the Pacific Marine's combat uniform. The Marines who went to Iceland had both the blue coveralls and the new one-piece, green herringbone coveralls for dirty or "fatigue" duty.

reinforcing units. There were two destroyer escorts and four fast destroyer transports (old four-stackers), stacks of each of two having been removed to make room for transporting one rifle company. The captains and executive officers of the transports were experienced regular Navy officers, but most of the remaining officers and men were recently called-up Reservists. Many of the Marines on these ships had far more time at sea than did most of the ships' companies.

While the Marines cruised south to Panama, the war situation in Europe prompted President Roosevelt to reconsider his plan for seizing and occupying Martinique or the Azores and to turn his attention to the more immediate threat to Iceland and the

relief of British forces there. Washington planners decided to form a provisional Marine brigade at Charleston, South Carolina, with the west coast Marines as its nucleus, augmented by the 5th Defense Battalion from Parris Island, South Carolina.

The battalion had been organized at Parris Island on 1 December 1940, with a cadre of officers and men from the 4th Defense Battalion. Colonel Lloyd L. Leech was the initial commanding officer. When ordered to Charleston in June 1941, the 5th Battalion was only partially trained and under-equipped, so emergency requisitions went to U.S. Army anti-aircraft artillery commands nationwide to provide the Marine battalion some new weapons and equipment, which were hastily delivered at dockside.

Battalion personnel were embarked in the USS *Orizaba* (AP 24); guns and cargo were loaded on the USS *Arcturus* (AK 18) and the USS *Hamul* (AK 30), two new cargo ships.

The Marines were deployed to Iceland because they were all volunteers, and unlike the draftee-encumbered Army, could be ordered overseas. Moreover, the 6th Marines was already at sea prepared for expeditionary duty. On 5 June, Roosevelt directed the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral Harold R. Stark, to have a Marine brigade ready to sail in 15 days' time.

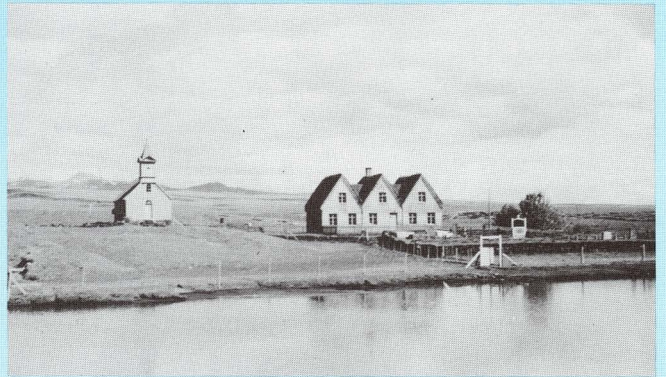
The brigade was formed on 16 June, the day following the arrival of the 6th Marines (Reinforced) in Charleston. The 1st Marine Brigade

# Iceland

Iceland is slightly smaller than the state of Kentucky, and features mountains, glaciers, volcanoes, geysers, hot springs, and lava beds. The southern coastal areas enjoy a temperate climate because the Gulf Stream passes close enough to modify the normal weather of the Arctic Circle which touches the northern coast. In 1941 the island had limited coastal roads, crossed by many rapidly flowing glacial streams. Coastal areas had grassy fields suitable for sheep and pony pasturage and tundra terrain completely devoid of bushes or trees. The population in 1941 numbered 120,000.

Fishing in the cold waters around Iceland was the nation's major industry. Along the 2,300 miles of jagged coastline, there were a number of small fishing villages reached only by sea, as there was no road network around the island. *Mountainous landscape, glacier formations, and overall rugged and inhospitable terrain as below provided the background to the Marine camps set up in Iceland. Pictured here is a Nissen hut built by Marines after their arrival.*

LtCol Harold K. Throneson Collection



Author's Collection

*Homesteads outside Reykjavik tended to be isolated.* land beyond the area of Reykjavik, the capital and main city.

At the outbreak of the war, Iceland enjoyed the status of autonomous parliamentary monarchy, sharing the Danish royal family with Denmark. When the Nazis overran Denmark in April 1940, the Icelandic Parliament voted to take over the executive power of the Danish King and to assume control of foreign affairs. The strategic island became an independent republic, but was wholly defenseless. This state of affairs gave rise to considerable concern by leaders in London and Washington, a concern not shared to any degree by the insular-minded Icelanders.

The majority of Icelandic citizens accepted the American occupation as a necessary evil. They didn't care much for the British, but were well aware of the German threat. There was a pro-German element among the populace because, before the war, German engineers had built Iceland's roads and had piped in hot water from the geysers to heat greenhouses in the city. As a result, there were some anti-foreign feelings, especially among youth groups.

Many of the Icelanders spoke English. They were a well-educated and literate people with a pure and ancient Viking language and the world's oldest representative government.

(Provisional) was formally organized under Brigadier General John Marston. His new command consisted of: Brigade Headquarters Platoon; Brigade Band; 6th Marines (Reinforced); 2d Battalion, 10th Marines; 5th Defense Battalion (less its 5-inch Artillery Group, which remained in the States); Company A, 2d Tank Battalion (less 3d Platoon); Company A, 2d Medical Battalion; Company C, 1st Engineer Battalion; 1st Platoon, Company A, 2d Service Battalion; 3d Platoon, 1st Scout Company; and Chemical Platoon. The para-

chute platoon was detached and reassigned to the 1st Marine Division, which happened also to be in Charleston when the 6th Marines arrived.

General Marston arrived in Charleston on 18 June with a small brigade headquarters staff. Admiral Stark's mission statement for the brigade was simple and direct: In cooperation with the British garrison, defend Iceland against hostile attack.

The new brigade, consisting of 4,095 Marines, departed Charleston

on 22 June. The men were not unhappy to leave the hot, humid, and noisy Navy yard. Most of the brigade's Marines were kept busy loading ships with additional supplies and equipment procured in Charleston by supply officers, and such incongruous items as skis, ski poles, and winter "protective clothing" purchased by supply officers at a local Sears Roebuck store.

Added to the convoy at Charleston were two cargo ships and two destroyers. It was met outside Charleston harbor by an impressive





Contemporary sketch by the author *June in the stormy North Atlantic* force of warships and escorts. When the entire convoy began its move towards the North Atlantic, it consisted of 25 vessels, including two battleships, the USS *New York* (BB 34) and USS *Arkansas* (BB 33), and two cruisers, USS *Nashville* (CL 43) and the USS *Brooklyn* (CL 40). While the convoy was underway, a Marine wrote a letter home on 27 June:

The clanging din and weird welder's lights were left to their

own confusion as we pulled out of the Yard, headed down river, past the little Fort Sumter, which seemed even smaller in the gray light of 0600 Sunday morning. We headed for the open sea and took a northern course.

Then began the hours which at sea stretch into days and repeat themselves so that one soon loses all track of date and time . . . . We began to lose track of where we were or where we were headed. There are daily troop formations, weapons inspection, general quarters drills, fire drills, abandon ship drills, and life vest inspection. Feeding the troops takes up much time, officers eat by shifts in the wardroom. Food is good and plentiful . . . .

The ships did not yet have surface radar, and so Marines were added to the continuous submarine watches from deck stations. Frequent appearance of U.S. Navy PBY aircraft flying antisubmarine warfare (ASW) patrols reassured the convoy and its Marine passengers. The Marine's letter continued:

This morning we are wallowing along at a couple of knots speed having been in a heavy fog for about eight hours. The ships keep blowing their fog horns to help maintain location and positions. I presume we are getting well spread as we approach the southern tip of Newfoundland. It will be interesting to see our formation when the fog lifts.

The convoy moved into Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, on the night of 27 June, leaving the fog outside. Some officers and men were allowed to go ashore at the small village of Argentia to stretch their legs and see the local scenery. Despite the windy, cold, wet weather, the battalions were able to get ashore at least one day for exercise and limited hikes, which helped to reduce the ill effects of too many hours of confinement and bunk duty on board the transports. During foul weather the only spaces troops had were below decks in their compartments and on their bunks.

The interlude at Newfoundland "to await further orders" continued until 1 July, when the government of

**M**ajor General John Marston, who died in November 1957, was born on 3 August 1884 in Pennsylvania, and was commissioned a Marine second lieutenant in June 1908. After five months' training at the School of Application at Annapolis, he began a period of barracks and sea-going duty. This culminated in assignment to the 1st Advance Base Regiment, which landed at and occupied Veracruz, Mexico, in January 1914. In 1915, then-First Lieutenant Marston was assigned to the Haitian Constabulary and operations against the bandit Cacos in Northern Haiti. After three years in Haiti, he served at the Naval Academy and at Quantico, until another overseas assignment, this time to the American Legation in Managua, Nicaragua, where he remained from 1922 to 1924. Following a number of as-

signments in the Quantico-Washington area, including a brief tour again in Nicaragua as a member of the U.S. Electoral Mission, in 1935 Colonel Marston was transferred to the American Embassy, Peiping. There he commanded the Marine Detachment, 1937-1938, and was senior commander of Marine forces in North China, 1938-1939. Brigadier General Marston became commander of the 1st Marine Brigade (Provisional) in June 1941 and took it to Iceland. Upon return to the United States in April 1942, he was promoted to major general and given command of the 2d Marine Division, moving with it to New Zealand. He returned to the States in August 1942 and was appointed commander of the Department of the Pacific, with headquarters in San Francisco. In April 1944, he was named Commanding General,

Camp Lejeune, and served in that position until 1946, when he retired to Lexington, Virginia.





National Archives Photo 127-N-185281

*Only one ship at a time could enter or leave the only entrance to Reykjavik harbor in June 1941. When the brigade convoy approached the port the sea was calm, the sun was well up, and a strong odor of fish floated out over the troop ships.*

Iceland finally, and reluctantly, invited the American occupation that Winston Churchill had requested and promised.

On the night of 1 July, the transports upped anchors at 2200 and slowly moved back out to sea headed for Iceland. During the following day, the transports steamed in file behind the *Arkansas* and *New York*. Fog drifted over the convoy, fog horns blew every few minutes, and all hands anxiously examined the ships' formation when the fog cleared. One day at officers' school the maps of Iceland were broken out and the staffs began to brief the company officers on the island, its terrain, weather, people, and what the mission would be. On 5 July, a more serious note was added when troops were ordered to wear life jackets at all times, for the convoy was entering the European war zone. Then at 2000 one night the destroyer on the starboard flank picked up a lifeboat with 14 survivors (four Red Cross women and 10 Norwegian sailors) of a ship torpedoed 200 miles to the south on 24 June. Their ship, the *Vigrid*, a Norwegian merchant ship, had developed engine trouble, fell behind its convoy, and was picked off by a German submarine.

The next day the convoy went through the flotsam and jetsam of the British battleship *HMS Hood*, which had been sunk by the German pocket battleship *Bismarck* on 24 May. Items of equipment from the *Hood* floating alongside their ships brought the war to the close attention of sober Marines lining the rails of their transports.

Early in the morning of 7 July, the brigade's convoy approached Iceland and the capital city of Reykjavik. The sea was glassy calm, the sun was well up and bright as it did not set in July in northern lands. The strong odor of fish floated out over the troop ships from the port. A couple of the transports were able to tie up at the small stone quays and Marines lined the rails to examine the people and sights of their new station.

Earlier, in May 1941, a battalion of Royal Marines had landed and occupied the capital city, Reykjavik. Ten days later they were relieved by a Canadian Army brigade.

The Canadians soon left for England and were replaced by British Army and Royal Air Force units. Some of the replacements were remnants of regiments which had been evacuated from Dunkirk. They were mostly Territorial Army units which

are similar to the U.S. National Guard. Antiaircraft artillery units, air defense fighters, and patrol bombers also established island defense installations. Hvalfjordur, a deep fjord 35 miles north of Reykjavik, became the site of an important naval anchorage.

Based at an airfield at Keflavik, about 30 miles south of Reykjavik, was a mixed bag of Royal Air Force aircraft including a few Hurricane fighters. It also held some patrol bombers: Hudsons, Sunderlands, and a small group of obsolescent float planes. Most of the British pilots at the field were veterans of the Battles of Britain and were sent to Keflavik for a spell of more relaxed duty. By the summer of 1941, the British contingent had about 25,000 troops in Iceland, including the Tyne-side Scottish, the Durham Light Infantry, and the Duke of Wellington's Regiment in the 79th Division, as well as some Royal Artillery field batteries, Royal Army engineers, and other detachments. In addition, 500 RAF personnel and about 2,000 sailors, who manned and serviced the anti-submarine vessels and mine sweepers based at Hvalfjordur, were on the island.

British soldiers ("Tommies") in their rugged battle-dress uniforms, heavy