



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 185076

*To weatherproof the Nissen huts, Marines banded sod up to heights of four feet around the foundations and tied down the*

*tin roofs with barbed wire. Despite these precautions, huts shuddered and shook when the winter's gale winds blew.*

*Iceland's long, warm summer days allowed Marines to hang their laundry on lines outside the huts to dry, except during*

*Iceland's frequent rain showers. In the winter, with short days and bad weather, drying clothes outdoors was impossible.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection





Contemporary sketch by the author  
*The wind blows very cold in Iceland.*

involved is fully recognized and deeply appreciated."

By late September, Marine leaders saw problems arising from a combination of short, dark days, bad weather, and troops bored and confined to quarters. One lieutenant wrote to his mother suggesting that the ladies in her church might be interested in sending the troops some playing cards, board games, dice, checkers, and similar items. Within weeks the lieutenant was overwhelmed with the requested games and supplies, plus large parcels of cookies and candy.

In October, as the days grew shorter, it rained, temperatures dropped, and the wind blew incessantly. The

ability to accomplish any meaningful field, tactical, or weapons' training lessened as the weather deteriorated. Many units were still busy improving their camp facilities and preparing for a wet, muddy winter. Officers spent hours censoring their men's mail and the men spent hours writing letters. Most junior officers had time-consuming extra duties and the troops were assigned to seemingly unending working parties. Tactical plans, trenches, emplacements, wire obstacles, and defense range cards for sectors of responsibility, had all been prepared during the early and balmy weeks of fall.

When the weather permitted, the

A 6th Marines staff noncommissioned officer conducts bayonet training in Iceland's mud. Note the galoshes and heavy

wool socks worn by all hands. With the approach of bad weather Marines were unable to conduct meaningful training.

LtCol Robert J. Vroegindewey Collection





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 185021

*Marines on expeditionary duty in Iceland in 1941 pause during their field training in the months before the winter weather*

*Officers of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, in Iceland, commanded by LtCol Oliver P. Smith (front row, fifth from left). He was to become assistant division commander of the 1st Marine Division on Cape Gloucester, division commander in the Korean War, and a four-star general at retirement. Two*

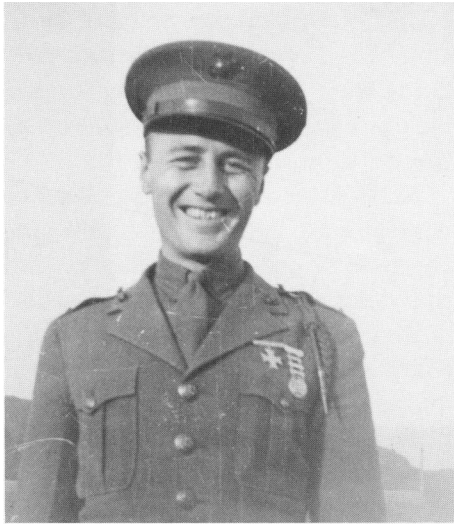
*made heavier clothing a necessity. These Marines wear the polar bear shoulder patch on their forest green uniforms.*

*other officers of the battalion would become generals: Lt William K. Jones (second row, extreme right) and Lt Michael P. Ryan (last row, third from right). Three battalion officers were killed in the Pacific in World War II. These were the "Old Breed" with whom the Corps went to war.*

LtCol Harold K. Thronesen Collection







Author's Collection

*2dLt William K. Jones eventually commanded the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, at Tarawa, Saipan, and Tinian. One of the youngest battalion commanders in World War II, he earned a Silver Star Medal on Tarawa and a Navy Cross at Saipan. He retired as commanding general of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific*

Marines played baseball and otherwise tried to keep in good physical condition by long-distance hikes and some cross-country runs on the grassy fields with their strange hummocks, rocks, and pools of mud. Marines who fell in the muck amused their comrades who needed all the laughs they could get. The brigade held no field maneuvers or large staff exercises until Major General Bonesteel arrived. He attempted to conduct some field exercises with the brigade units located near Reykjavik and the air base. The 3d Battalion was too far away at Brauterholt peninsula to participate and was just about completely immobile by the lack of any wheeled transport.

Some joint Army-Marine command post exercises were conducted for the staffs. When the weather and darkness began to restrict field training, some units of the brigade initiated schooling for both officers and enlisted Marines. The 1st Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Oliver P. Smith, who was well schooled himself and a graduate of France's *Ecole de Guerre Superieure*,

held officers' schools on military subjects. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel William A. Worton, commander of the 2d Battalion, was interested in establishing literacy classes in "everything from simple arithmetic to calculus." Lieutenant William C. Chamberlin, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Dartmouth College, who had been working in his spare time on his doctorate degree at the University of Iceland, was made "Headmaster" of the battalion's schools which employed officer and NCO teachers. Eventually more than 125 Marines attended classes in a variety of basic subjects. It helped to keep young minds busy when they had very little else to occupy their spare time. Before it had become too dark during the days, there had been a fair amount of range firing of crew-served weapons — machine guns and mortars — but field exercises were just no longer feasible now.

During their deployment to Iceland, the firing batteries of the 2d Battalion, 10th Marines, had been attached in support of the three infantry battalions of the 6th Marines and initially were located adjacent to the infantry camps. In the late fall, the batteries were returned to their parent battalion control and relocated at a new camp, Camp Tientsin. This move was made to facilitate artillery technical training and permit more efficient field firing planning and execution by the battalion.

In the ever-darker winter weeks, almost all military training came to a standstill. Close-order drill in the morning by moonlight was just not effective. Rifles' barrels had to be inspected indoors by lamp light reflected from a thumbnail placed in the chamber. Some weapons drills were held in the huts. Much time was dedicated to ensuring the health and comfort of the Marines without losing sight of the defense mission. It wasn't easy. The wind blew constantly with gusts of 70 to 100 miles per hour and the Marines settled down

to whatever training they could conduct in their quarters.

A traditional pastime which always kept Marines busy was to maintain personal gear with "spit and polish." The M1903 Springfield rifle had a wooden stock made of carefully selected walnut. It took a beautiful polish when linseed oil was rubbed into the wood by the Marine's palm. His rifle was his personal weapon, constantly inspected and handled with care and pride. The other habitual Marine practice was to shine the issue chocolate brown-colored, high-top leather shoes to a high gloss.

Dealing with their own and their Marines' sheer boredom became a real problem for both junior and senior commanders. Mail call, though the letters and packages often arrived late in battered and tattered condition, very often wet, was a highlight in a day's schedule. Enlist-

*Lt William C. Chamberlin, education officer of the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, was made "headmaster" of the battalion's schools which employed both officers and enlisted Marines as instructors. He had a distinguished record as a combat leader in the battles for Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan, and Tinian. He was decorated with both the Navy Cross and the Silver Star Medal for heroism.*

Author's Collection





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 185298  
*Shortage of organic motor transport in the Brigade forced it to depend upon the good will of the British or the U.S. Army for trucking personnel and supplies, or tactical mobility. The only trucks available in the Brigade were the one-ton artillery prime movers, as seen here, from the 10th Marines battalion attached to the Brigade. The bleak, desolate quality of Iceland is evident.*

ed Marines were issued two free cans of beer per day from the post exchange, an event which also broke the monotony. As always, card games for high stakes were a popular pastime. Most of the gamblers' pay "rode the books" as there was no place to spend it. Because there was little to read, one company commander often took a book to his men's huts and read to them as they and their salty and grizzled NCOs sat at his feet and listened with rapt attention. Some nights he sneaked in a bottle of whiskey for the men. They described these visits as "the skipper's mail call."

With the advancing cold weather and snow, each battalion formed an ad hoc "ski patrol" with a potential mission of rescuing crews of downed aircraft or to find persons lost in the rugged country. The patrol consisted of an officer and a few men, mostly from New England, who claimed to be experienced skiers. Their chief problem was that they had no sup-

ply of proper ski boots or bindings or wax. The skis purchased in Charleston were simple wooden ones with a toe strap only, and the poles provided were basic beginner's bamboo sticks. The snow was never deep enough around Marine camps for good skiing and fortunately there were no emergencies calling for a ski patrol rescue.

As noted earlier, a major difficulty facing Marine units in remote outpost camps was the shortage of transportation. Marine infantry battalions had no motor transport of their own — neither jeeps nor trucks, prime movers nor weapons carriers. The 2d Battalion, 10th Marines, had small, one-ton truck prime movers for its 75mm pack howitzers. The brigade had a motor transport platoon with some old two-ton trucks. The defense battalion had a few vehicles, but there were no general-purpose, staff, command, or utility vehicles in the brigade. Only the generosity of the U.S. and British armies, which loaned the Marines a small number of trucks enabled them to meet the most basic logistic requirements. The British had also loaned the Marines a few of their small "staff" or reconnaissance vehicles which were little more than four-cylinder sport cars painted olive drab. The Army gener-

ously provided the brigade with some jeeps and 3/4-ton trucks, and made their 2 1/2-ton trucks available to transport Marine working parties and for logistic support.

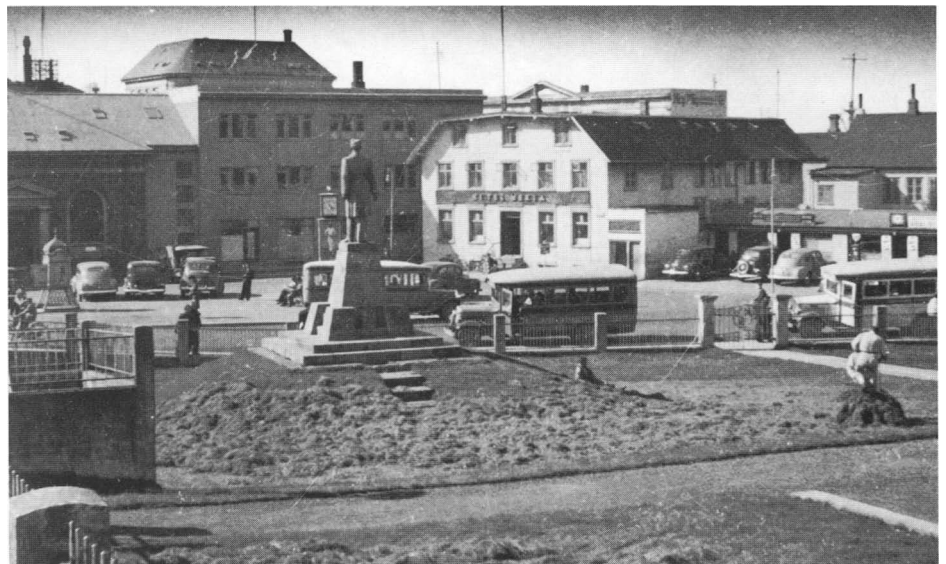
Lack of motor transport was a continuing problem for the brigade for most of its time in Iceland. With the dearth of motor vehicles and material handling equipment, the Marines continued to move by foot and to use their backs to handle supplies. One benefit was that most enlisted ranks kept physically fit despite the lack of a formal physical fitness program.

Recreation for Marines in the city and vicinity of Reykjavik was very limited. The few existing restaurants were small, barely able to serve both the local citizens and a few British and American troops. There were only two small movie theaters and the Hotel Borg — the largest and best in town — which were the centers of the Icelanders' social life. The Borg attracted the Allied officers to its dances but was "out of bounds" to enlisted troops. Single girls frequented the hotel to dance with the officers and even to establish some promising friendships.

The staff non-commissioned officers had a favorite restaurant and the lower ranks made do with what

*Downtown Reykjavic, the capital of Iceland, was in 1941 a city of grey stucco buildings with a strong odor of fish. It was an oasis of civilization, however.*

Col Chester M. Craig Collection





# Clothing for Iceland

The Marines were issued items of special winter clothing: some good 20-year-old stocks of mustard-colored wool shirts which were used in "banana war" campaigns; woolen underwear; heavy wool socks; rubber galoshes; some short sheepskin-lined canvas coats from Sears Roebuck and Co.; and "foul-weather gear," black rubber or canvas coats and pants from civilian sources. Some officers and men obtained fine olive-drab parkas with alpaca linings from the Army.

For working parties and training, the felt field hat and the one-piece blue denim or olive herringbone utility uniform were frequently worn. Sweatshirts gave an added layer of warmth, but the field-combat clothing issued Marines for service in Iceland was far from satisfactory. The result

was that Marines in the field or on the continuous working parties did not look military. The Marine Corps had no winter field service combat uniform other than its winter service greens, including the overcoat in the same heavy wool worn since World War I, but tailored for appearance rather than field service. Marine officers in Iceland fared a bit better as they had access to British officers' stores where they could buy fine quality trench coats, officers' boots, wool shirts, wool socks, and other items.

The one distinctive item of Marine Corps uniform issue which was also the most popular was the fur cap with the emblem on the front. The cap had a green crown and thick brown "fur" trim and ear flaps. It had a North China-duty Marine ancestry.



National Archives Photo 127-N-185074

*Marines in sheepskin coats and wearing garrison caps or fur hats pose before their decorated Nissen hut before Iceland's winter set in. Appropriate weather proofing kept the interior of the huts relatively warm despite the cold.*

*A Marine in service greens with polar bear patch, fur hat, galoshes, and heavy wool socks poses in the Icelandic cold.*

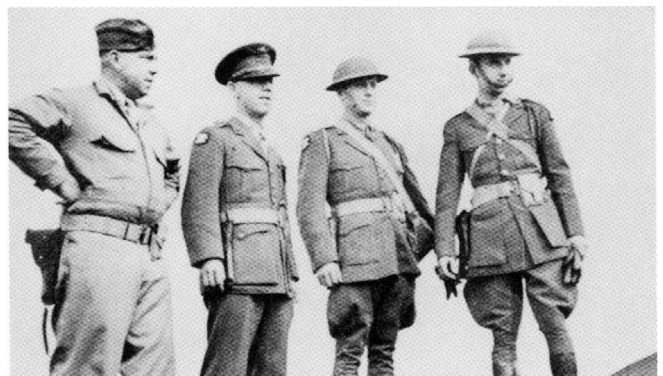


National Archives Photo 127-N-185069

*6th Marines commander Col Leo D. Hermle is dressed for cold weather in his fur hat and lined winter parka. The weather was cold, but it hadn't snowed yet. Col Hermle retired as a lieutenant general at the end of World War II.*

*Typical of uniforms worn by officers in Iceland is that of LtCol Oliver P. Smith, commander of 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, at right. His uniform, breeches with leather leggings, was that of a pre-World War II field grade officer.*

Col Chester M. Craig Collection







Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 524213

*A Marine rifle squad, all armed with the Springfield rifle, model 1903, maneuver in the half-light of the Icelandic winter.*

*Note that not all Brigade Marines had winter clothing other than their forest greens. The snow made movement difficult.*

*The crew of a 37mm antitank gun maneuver it into position for relaying while conducting gun drill in the snow of the Icelandic winter. They are wearing the sheepskin coats pur-*

*chased in Charleston while en route to Iceland, and the fur cap worn by Marines in North China. Note that the pipe-smoking NCO in charge of the crew wears a salty field hat.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection





Marine Corps Historical Collection

*Window-shopping in downtown Reykjavic was one of the few pleasures to be had. Recreation in the city and its outskirts was very limited at all times. The city had two small movie theaters and dancing for officers at the Hotel Borg.*

facilities were left, which weren't much. Travel was so difficult that many Marines decided that going to town wasn't worth the effort required.

The Marines had brought with them a few musical instruments, such as guitars. As time passed, the Red Cross provided additional recreational equipment, radios, and record players. As the troops were forced to depend upon their own resources, they soon produced several clever and amusing shows.

Movies for the Marines weren't available until September. The brigade had brought no projection equipment with its expeditionary combat gear. One projector was passed around the battalions of the brigade, which then used living huts or mess buildings for shows once or twice a week until they could finally build recreation huts. Eventually some of the camps were able to construct recreation huts for movie shows, where the small beer ration could be dispensed, and in which a small post exchange could be set up.

*As the Brigade brought few recreation items to Iceland, the officers and enlisted Marines had to improvise to entertain themselves. Here Lt Harold C. "Bing" Boehm, the leading singer in the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, officers' mess, conducts his fellow officers in a group sing. For heroism while commanding the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, in close combat at Iwo Jima, he later was awarded the Navy Cross.*

Author's Collection







Author's Collection

*Until room was found for post exchanges in newly built recreation huts in the camps, Brigade Marines depended upon the periodic visit of a truck carrying for sale at minimal cost such post exchange staples as smoking, washing, and shaving items.*

Previously, a truck would visit the camps periodically with a selection of post exchange items such as smoking, washing, and shaving supplies. During the winter months, the recreation buildings served to provide space for small libraries, barber service, amateur shows, classrooms, and religious services.

The battalion camp galleys were primitive at best and tested the skills of the cooks and frequently the stomachs of the Marines, but at least

the rations were usually freshly prepared and warm. World War II combat rations had not yet appeared. Rations were never elaborate or fancy but were healthy and adequate. Meals were made with frozen, dried, and tinned foods prepared on old Marine Corps World War I-vintage, kerosene-burning, trailer-mounted "buzzacot" stoves. Beans, frozen fowl, salmon, mashed potatoes, corned beef, stew, canned fruits, powdered milk, coffee, and some baked goods

were typical items on the menu. (Officers were charged fifty cents per day for rations.) The menu was repeated every ten days. There were no field combat rations. Troops ate from their World War I mess kits: two pans with a handle and steel spoon, knife, and fork. Each man washed his own mess kit in GI cans holding boiling soapy water followed by a dip in boiling clear water. Nobody suffered, but it was an antiquated system.

With the arrival of the Army, the Marines changed from Navy rations to the Army menu which included experimental field rations consisting largely of Spam, sausage, and dehydrated items. The Navy had been supplying an acceptable variety of canned and dried foods, but the new Army rations weren't very popular with most Marines. There was no refrigeration, no running water in the galleys, and no good way to heat water until the Army brought in No. 5 coal ranges and immersion heaters to heat water to boiling for washing the men's mess gear. Prior to this, water had been heated on the cooking ranges. The mess halls had rough wooden benches and tables, and

*Marines line up in the mud for chow served from expeditionary cans on a truck.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection

