



Courtesy of LtGen William K. Jones  
*Cards identical to this one drawn by 2dLt James A. Donovan carried holiday greetings from Marines in Iceland to friends and relatives in the United States during the first weeks after 7 December.*

both the galleys and mess halls were pungent with the odor of mutton and codfish obtained from local sources. Messmen described the day's menu as "mutton, lamb, sheep, or ram." Local milk and cheese products were prohibited because it was reported that many of Iceland's cows were tubercular.

The Marines were issued a highly concentrated chocolate candy bar as a "combat" ration to be consumed in case the Germans attacked and other rations were not available. One gunnery sergeant dubbed this ration "the last-chance goody bar."

Communications in the brigade were primitive even by the standards of World War II. The primary means of tactical and administrative communications were the land lines and sound-powered telephones which tied together companies, battalions, regiment, and brigade. Bat-

talion and higher headquarters had radio equipment that could be broken down into man-pack loads and were powered by hand-cranked generators. Eventually gasoline-powered generator units provided electricity for radios as well as camp lighting.

World news and information of events at home came mostly from naval channels and personal mail, which took two to four weeks to arrive via destroyers. A brigade weekly newspaper, *The Arctic Marine*, provided some world news, American sports news, some local news items, and Marine humor.

As the winter days passed, and no movement orders had been published, the Marines began to face the possibility of an indefinite stay in Iceland. They had no way of knowing that in November, powers in Washington had decided to begin

*A winter scene at one of the camps, when the wind velocity was 65 miles per hour.*

Author's Collection



redeploying them early in 1942, when more Army troops were scheduled to arrive in Iceland. The brigade would then return to the United States on the Army transports which brought the soldiers. When word spread of the pending move home, griping about the dark, dull life in the barren camps declined and the days became more bearable. The prospect of returning to Marine Corps command was also heartening.

During the weeks leading up to 7 December and the entry of America into the war, the Marines had no real morale problems outside of the boredom already described and an inability to wander far from their camps. After 7 December, attitudes, motivation, and interests focused upon the Pacific War and the fate of Marine friends attacked and captured by the Japanese at Wake Island, Guam, China, and the Philippines. The outbreak of the Pacific War didn't change the conditions under which the Marines existed in Iceland, as they were already in a war theater and on war alert. There had been rumors of the Marines going elsewhere than home when the Army arrived, but no firm plans had been prepared, at least on the brigade level. After 7 December, the Marines' great fear was that they would be left in Iceland. There were no more complaints by troops about Iceland hardships, they just wanted to get to the Pacific.

Christmas 1941 was a relatively good day for the Marines. They enjoyed a proper holiday meal of turkey, baked ham, and the other traditional elements of a Christmas dinner plus free beer and cigars. The Navy had provided a number of small trees for the mess halls and all hands turned to in efforts to do some appropriate decorations. The first really heavy snowfall blanketed the drab camps to provide a proper white Christmas.

Some fortunate Marines who had made friends with Icelandic families

were invited to their homes for the evening. Marine officers and some British officers enjoyed traditional family celebrations to which they were able to contribute some gin, nuts, fruit, candy, and items not easy for the Icelanders to obtain. These hospitable families shared their children, food, songs, and good will with the soldiers and Marines occupying their country. It was a memorable and merry day for all.

By January, the wind was blowing so hard and so constantly, many camps had to install hand lines from the huts to the heads and mess buildings to help keep all Marines from being blown and sliding off the paths into the mud. Major David M. Shoup wrote his wife on 20 January 1942:

Well, we had a couple days ago one of those wind storms for which this place is noted. And in spite of the huts that are built and banked to "take it," a number had the ends sucked out, others just pressed together and some messhalls of Icelandic concrete construction were laid low . . . I saw men rolled along the ground. I moved all out of my hut that was loose and locked the safes and field desks . . . and hoped . . . The wind was 80 miles per hour all day with intermittent gusts reaching velocities of 120 miles per hour.

In January 1942, the brigade received orders to begin moving home. The redeployment was to be executed by battalions. First to leave was the 3d Battalion, scheduled to depart on 31 January. The battalion quickly turned its camps over to Army units and embarked, but not until it had set up the Army's metal bunks and made up their beds (as ordered by Iceland Base Command). The Marines short-sheeted most of the bunks as a farewell gesture to the soldiers. The advance echelon of Army officers arrived in a cold, howling snowstorm and proceeded to

slip, slide, and fall on the icy roads. The "Thundering Third" departed in a hurry and left the soldiers to their new misery.

The small convoy of a couple of cargo vessels and a troop-ship with the 3d Battalion took a far northerly route off the coast of Greenland in order to avoid German submarines which were becoming increasingly active in the North Atlantic. The escort consisted of a light cruiser and a few destroyers. The weather was very heavy with green water breaking over all the weather decks. Gun crews on decks had to be secured from their stations. Ice formed all over the ships and most of the Marines took to their bunks sea-sick.

After a week of rough sailing, the convoy pulled into the Brooklyn Navy Yard and the troops rapidly debarked. Marines from eastern states were to go on 15 days' leave while those from states west of the Mississippi would take a troop train to San Diego where they would begin their leave. The battalion was to reassemble at Camp Elliott in early March.

A large number of Marines scattered into Manhattan dressed in fur caps and green winter overcoats, with polar bear shoulder patches and the 6th Marines' fourrageres—the shoulder cord representing the Croix de Guerre awarded the 6th in World War I—and a rolling seaman's gait from the rough sea passage. They were the first units to return from the European Theater of Operations and received a warm welcome from New Yorkers wherever they went.

During February, the Army infantry battalion which had replaced the 3d Battalion at Brauterholt was ordered to move back into the Reykjavik area where the 10th Infantry Regiment was concentrating its units. So, the 1st Battalion, reorganized as a provisional battalion, went to considerable effort to move troops and equipment in horrible weather back out to the unattractive camp. A few weeks later they returned and em-



Marine Corps Historical Collection

Col Leo D. Hermle and MajGen John Marston hold the Iceland Challenge shield presented to the 1st Brigade "as a token of comradeship by the British Forces in Iceland, 1941-42." The brigade took it home to Camp Pendleton.

barked for the States. The 1st and 2d Battalions, with attachments from other brigade units, began to mount out for the return home on 8 March 1942. The weather was cold, wet, and windy, making the movement to the docks miserable and hazardous. But loading went on around the clock as all hands were ready and eager to get going. The brigade headquarters and 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, and its attached units, were the last of the brigade to depart Iceland. Their ships sailed from Reykjavik at 0800 on 9 March, then delayed for three days up the Hvalfjordur fjord waiting for the ships coming from Ireland to gather and form up the convoy for the trip home.

The North Atlantic is on its worst behavior during the late winter months, so each of the battalions experienced the same rough seas, cold

temperatures, and icing as the convoy constantly changed its heading to avoid submarines while enroute to New York harbor and the welcome sight of the Statue of Liberty.

On 8 March 1942, General Marston had moved his command post from on shore to the transport USS *McCawley*, and the Marine brigade returned to its place within the naval establishment. So ended a unique phase of World War II wherein a Marine unit was "detached for service with the Army by order of the President." The brigade headquarters landed at New York on 25 March at which time the brigade was disbanded.

With the rest of the 1st Marine Brigade (Provisional), the 5th Defense Battalion was relieved by Army units in March. The 61st Coast

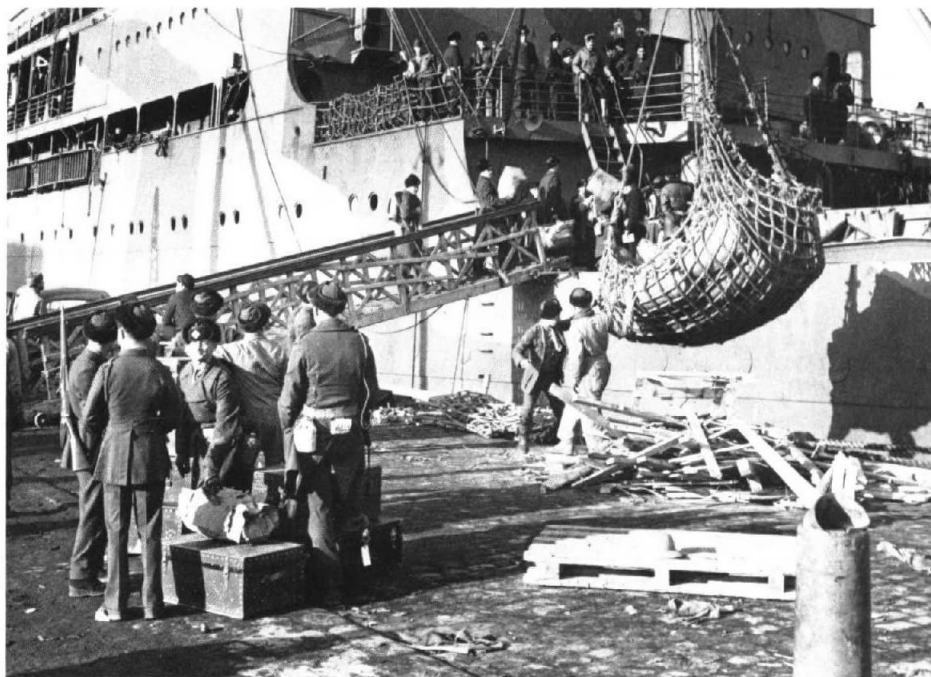
Artillery took over Marine positions and guns and the battalion embarked for New York in the U.S. Army Transport *Boringuen*. By July of 1942, most of the battalion was enroute to the South Pacific: New Zealand, Guadalcanal-Tulagi, and Funafuti, Ellice Islands. The 6th Marines and the artillery battalion of the 10th Marines rejoined the 2d Division at Camp Elliott in California, as did other supporting units.

How much strategic value the Marine deployment had remains a question. It did not actually relieve many British troops. The German threat became minimal because the Nazis were already overcommitted in Russia and North Africa. The deployment tied up numbers of experienced officers and men in Iceland when they were sorely needed in California. The end of March 1942 saw all

Iceland Marines—except those on leave—back in California where they provided trained cadres for numerous newly formed units: raiders, defense battalions, artillery, and the 9th Marines of the new 3d Marine Division.

By the end of 1942, some of these Marines were battling the Japanese on Guadalcanal in the South Pacific. Other Iceland Marines went on to serve with distinction in the other major amphibious assaults of the Pacific War.

The Marines in the brigade were benefited by a unique experience of field service which added to the record and character of the Corps. Their tour in Iceland gave validity to the first line of the second verse of the *Marines' Hymn*, "In the snows of far off northern lands . . ."



Marine Corps Historical Collection

*Marines load their gear on board a transport which has just unloaded U.S. Army units which are relieving the 1st Marine Brigade. On the way home, the ships would be wallowing in the North Atlantic heavy seas and coated with ice.*

## Staff and Command List 1st Marine Brigade (Provisional) July 1941

### Brigade Headquarters

BGen John Marston . . . . . Commanding Officer  
Col Charles I. Murray . . . . . Executive Officer  
Maj Walter A. Churchill . . . . . B-2  
Maj Edwin C. Ferguson . . . . . B-3  
Capt George H. Brockway . . . . . B-4  
Capt Robert E. Hill . . . . . Adjutant and B-1

### 6th Marines

Col Leo D. Hermle . . . . . Commanding Officer  
LtCol William McN. Marshall . . . . . Executive Officer  
Maj David M. Shoup . . . . . R-3  
Capt Arnold F. Johnston . . . . . R-1  
Capt William T. Wise . . . . . R-2  
Maj Ralph D. Leach . . . . . R-4

### 1st Battalion

LtCol Oliver P. Smith . . . . . Commanding Officer  
Maj Clarence H. Baldwin . . . . . Executive Officer and Bn-3  
1stLt Robert W. Rickert . . . . . Bn-1  
1stLt Loren E. Haffner . . . . . Bn-2  
1stLt Charlton B. Rogers, III . . . . . Bn-4

### 2d Battalion

LtCol William A. Worton . . . . . Commanding Officer  
Maj Joseph F. Hankins . . . . . Executive Officer  
Capt Thomas J. Colley . . . . . Bn-3  
1stLt Rathvon McC. Tompkins . . . . . Bn-1

1stLt William W. Young, Jr. . . . . Bn-4  
2dLt William C. Chamberlin . . . . . Bn-2

### 3d Battalion

LtCol Maurice G. Holmes . . . . . Commanding Officer  
Maj Chester B. Graham . . . . . Executive Officer  
Capt Robert J. Kennedy . . . . . Bn-3  
1stLt Harold C. Boehm . . . . . Bn-2  
2dLt Cyril C. Sheehan . . . . . Bn-4

### 5th Defense Battalion

Col Lloyd L. Leech . . . . . Commanding Officer  
LtCol Charles N. Muldrow . . . . . Executive Officer  
Maj George F. Good, Jr. . . . . Bn-3  
Capt H. S. Leon . . . . . Bn-2  
Capt Charles W. Shelburne . . . . . Bn-4

### Reinforcing Units

#### 2d Battalion, 10th Marines

LtCol John B. Wilson . . . . . Commanding Officer  
Maj Archie V. Gerard . . . . . Executive Officer  
Capt Harry A. Traffert, Jr. . . . . Bn-4  
1stLt Thomas S. Ivey . . . . . Bn-3  
1stLt Martin Fenton . . . . . Bn-2

1st Scout Company . . . . . Capt Reed M. Fawell, Jr.  
1st Engineer Battalion . . . . . 1stLt Levi W. Smith, Jr.  
2d Medical Battalion . . . . . LCdr Ralph E. Fielding (MC)  
2d Service Battalion . . . . . 2dLt Arthur F. Torgler, Jr.  
2d Tank Battalion . . . . . Capt John H. Cook, Jr.

## Sources

The basic sources for this work are: *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II—Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*, by LtCol Frank O. Hough, Maj Verle E. Ludwig, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr. (Washington: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, HQMC, 1958); *A Brief History of the 6th Marines* (Washington: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1987) by LtGen William K. Jones, USMC (Ret); *Follow Me! The Story of the Second Marine Division in World War II* (New York: Random House, 1948) by Richard W. Johnston; *The Battle of the Atlantic* (Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1977) by Barrie Pitt and Time-Life editors; *The United States Marines: 1775-1975* (New York: Viking Press, 1976) by BGen Edwin H. Simmons, USMC (Ret); *The United States Marine Corps* (New York: Praeger, 1967) by Col James A. Donovan, USMC (Ret); *The United States Marines in Iceland* (Washington: Historical Division, HQMC, 1970) by LtCol Kenneth J. Clifford, USMCR; "Iceland," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Nov65; *The First Marine Brigade (Provisional) 1941-1942* (Washington: Historical Division, HQMC, 1946) by John L. Zimmerman; *Mr. Roosevelt's Navy* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute Press, 1975) by Patrick Abbazia; and *U.S. Marine Corps Aviation* (Washington: DCNO [Air Warfare] and ComNavAirSys, 1978) by MajGen John P. Condon, USMC (Ret).

All oral history transcripts addressing the Marine deployment to Iceland were examined. The interviews with the following officers were found particularly useful: Gen Oliver P. Smith; MajGen William A. Worton; MajGen Raymond L. Murray; and LtGen Leo D. Hermle. In addition, the diary, notes, and comments of LtCol Oliver P. Smith about his duties as CO, 1stBn, 6th Mar, serving at San Diego, California, and Iceland were researched in the Personal Papers Collection, Marine Corps Historical Center.

Besides the letters, photographs, interview tapes, and personal papers of the author, others from the following were gratefully received and useful in writing this history: LtCol Harold K. Throneson, USMC (Ret); Gen David M. Shoup, USMC (Ret) (Dec) (letters and papers furnished by Mrs. D. M. Shoup); Col David E. Marshall, USMC (Ret); LtCol Robert J. Vroegindewey, USMC (Ret); and Col James O. Appleyard, USMC (Ret). The files of the Reference and Archives Sections of the Marine Corps Historical Center were also researched for material and official documentation relating to the Marine deployment to Iceland.



## About the Author

Colonel James A. Donovan, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired), entered the Marine Corps via the 1938 Western Platoon Leaders Class. He was commissioned in the Reserve upon graduation from Dartmouth College in 1939 and went on active duty with Chicago's 9th Reserve Battalion in 1940.

He soon was assigned to the 6th Marines and remained in the regiment throughout World War II, participating in battles at Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan, and Tinian. He served as platoon leader, company commander, operations officer, and finally executive officer of the 1st Battalion. He was awarded the Bronze Star and Silver Star Medals.

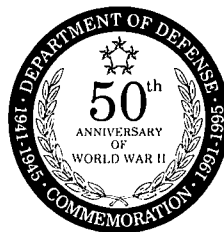
After World War II, he was editor of *Leatherneck Magazine*. During the Korean War he was assigned to 1st Marine Division and later went to 3d Marine Division on Okinawa to command the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines.

He retired from active service in November 1963 and became publisher of the *Army, Navy, Air Force Journal*. In 1967 he went to work at Georgia Tech in public relations and publications, and retired in 1980.

Colonel Donovan is the author of *The United States Marine Corps* (Praeger, 1967) and *Militarism, U.S.A.* (Scribners, 1970).



### WORLD WAR II



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