Anniversary Celebration of the First Overseas Expedition of the United States Marine Corps

On February 11, 1943, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania celebrated, in cooperation with the United States Marine Corps, the one hundred and sixty-seventh anniversary of the first overseas expedition of that Corps. The Society was honored, on this occasion, by the presence of Major General Alexander A. Vandergrift, Brigadier General Robert L. Denig, and other officers and men of the Marine Corps—including several wounded veterans who had participated in recent actions in the Solomons. The Society was also honored by the attendance of Lieutenant-Governor John C. Bell, Mayor Bernard Samuel, and other civilian leaders. Mrs. Otto Spies and Mrs. Edward B. Tryon, direct descendants of Captain Samuel Nicholas, leader of the first overseas expedition, participated in the ceremonies, which were presided over by Mr. Frederic R. Kirkland, Chairman of the Committee on Arrangements.

Through the courtesy of the Marine Corps, arrangements were made for the broadcasting of the celebration by the Columbia network. The proceedings as heard over this hook-up are printed below.

Announcer: It was just one hundred and sixty-seven years ago today that the first overseas expedition of an American armed force set forth from the vicinity of Philadelphia. The fighting personnel of that first expedition was made up of members of the nation's oldest and proudest military establishment—the United States Marine Corps. Like subsequent expeditions of this famous Corps, the first expedition was successful, resulting in the capture of much needed supplies and ammunition for the Colonies which were then struggling to weld themselves into a nation.
Today, in the Hall of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, here in Philadelphia, members of the Society—many of whom trace their ancestry back to the valiant Marines who accompanied that first expedition—are gathered to commemorate this important date in our history and pay tribute to the Marines who are carrying on in the victorious tradition of their forbears. Representing the Marine Corps in these ceremonies are Brigadier General Robert L. Denig, director of the Division of Public Relations, and Major General Alexander A. Vandergrift, who commanded the Marines in the Solomons—the only Marine in this war to receive both the Congressional Medal of Honor and the Navy Cross. The next voice you hear will be that of Mr. Frederic Kirkland, chairman of events of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. . . .

**Mr. Kirkland:** It gives me great pleasure to introduce the next speaker, who, as a matter of fact, needs little introduction, as I am sure you all know him. However, I would like to add that if he does half as good a job as Lieutenant-Governor as he did as Secretary of Banking, we can all be sure of a very able administration. Lieutenant-Governor Bell.

**Lieutenant-Governor Bell:** Pennsylvania welcomes back to their birthplace the United States Marines. We congratulate you on this, the one hundred and sixty-seventh anniversary of the first Marine Expedition. I do not believe there is a man, woman or child in America who is not familiar with the memorable achievements of the Marines on the far-flung battle fronts of the world. From the Bahamas in 1776, with John Paul Jones in his famous battles, with Washington at Trenton and Princeton, with General Jackson at New Orleans, from the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli, down through Belleau Wood, St. Mihiel, the Argonne, all the way to Wake, Guadalcanal and the Solomons, the Marines have won fame in song and story.

We are particularly honored to have with us today General Alexander A. Vandergrift, a man who symbolizes more graphically than words can convey that branch of our armed forces which has written so many brilliant chapters into the glorious military history of this nation. When President Roosevelt recently conferred upon
General Vandergrift the Congressional Medal of Honor, he pleased every American citizen, for he was merely expressing the universal sentiments of every American toward the valor and unconquerable fighting spirit of the United States Marines.

In every war that the United States has ever fought, Pennsylvania, like the Marines, has always taken a leading part. In the Revolution, Pennsylvania had more troops engaged than any state except Massachusetts; in the Civil War, Pennsylvania had more troops engaged than any state on the Northern side. Nearly every American knows Pennsylvania's record in the First World War and in this World War. Pennsylvania has wisely been called the Keystone State not only because of its location, but because of its great industrial activity and importance. Today, Pennsylvania, home of Valley Forge and Gettysburg, is continuing her wonderful record. The state of Pennsylvania is producing approximately one-quarter of all the vital war materials and is furnishing to our armed forces one man in every thirteen. No other state in the nation can match that achievement.

While we of Pennsylvania are very proud of the part our state is playing in this war, we here on the home front, compared with the men in our armed forces, are, in my opinion, not yet doing our part or making sufficient sacrifices. If all of us would only think more of the Marines and the boys who are fighting our battles in the blue of heaven, on the seven seas, and in the far corners of the globe, sometimes frozen, sometimes overcome with heat, bravely enduring hardships and privations almost beyond belief, subject constantly to danger and death, oftentimes fighting or working days at a stretch, with no time and a half for overtime, we would realize how comparatively little we are doing here on the home front. We here at home must prove ourselves worthy of the tremendous sacrifices made by the boys in our armed forces.

Patriotism must be substituted for selfishness, hard work for laziness or indifference. We must constantly remember that we are fighting this war for freedom and for the preservation of the American way of life. The price of victory is very high—harder and much longer work, many and far greater sacrifices, tears and blood and wounds and death. But the price of defeat is far greater—the price of defeat is starvation and slavery! Every strike or slow-down which
involves planes or ships, tanks, ammunition, armaments or even transportation, may result in the loss of thousands of American lives. We must all remember that battles cannot be won today with bare hands and brave hearts. Labor and Capital must daily and hourly remember that the nation with the will to win, the nation best equipped with planes, ships, tanks and guns, will win this war. Labor and Capital must remember that the boys in uniform, your boy and my boy, their boy and his buddy, are making a tremendous and sometimes a supreme sacrifice.

For the sake of our own flesh and blood, for the salvation of our country and the preservation of the American way of life, the American working man and the employer must abandon their grievances, must unite and pull together so that Pennsylvania as the Arsenal of America can triple its already record-breaking production and produce an avalanche of planes, ships and armaments sufficient to crush Hitler and Japan.

Pennsylvania hopes and believes that the United States Marines, by their indomitable valor, will continue to add new luster and fame to their glorious past.

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Bell. It now gives me pleasure to introduce to you Mayor Bernard Samuel.

MAYOR SAMUEL: The City of Philadelphia is greatly honored this afternoon by this history-making ceremony.

We are honored especially by the presence here of Major General Vandergrift, the hero of Guadalcanal, under whose leadership courageous and intrepid Marines checked the advance of the Japanese who were threatening the invasion of Australia and New Zealand. The exploits of General Vandergrift and his Marines in the Solomons, in my opinion, marked the turning point of the war in the Pacific. From the defensive our fighting forces, for the first time, took the offensive, and when the history of the war with Japan is written, its most glowing chapters, necessarily, must be devoted to the achievements of our Marines in the Solomons during the closing months of 1942.

The American people were happy indeed when the Commander-in-Chief of the United States Armed Forces presented the Medal of
Honor to General Vandergrift in recognition of a task well performed and one which, I believe I am correct in stating, prevented ultimate attacks of our enemies on our Pacific coast.

We are also honored today by the observance of the one hundred and sixty-seventh anniversary of the first overseas expedition of the Marine Corps of the United States, which put out to sea from the vicinity of Philadelphia for the Bahamas before the birth of our nation. The Marine Corps was formed by the Continental Congress in Independence Hall, November 10, 1775, only a few months after George Washington had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. From its very beginning this Corps has been closely associated with the development of our city.

The City of Philadelphia has been closely identified with all the wars in which this country has engaged. It was the hub of the wheel of the stirring events in which was brought about the establishment of our nation in 1776. It has upheld this heritage in all subsequent struggles for the preservation of the Republic. Today, thousands and thousands of our men and women are in uniform while several hundred thousands of our citizens are engaged in the manufacture of munitions and supplies which are sent to our armed forces and those of our allies on the battlefronts of the world. Every one of our citizens is participating either directly or indirectly with the war effort.

I feel that it is fitting that the observance by the Marine Corps of the anniversary of its first overseas expedition should be held in this patriotic old city. Here were born the ideals for which we and our allies are now fighting on every continent and on every sea. The preservation of these ideals for the protection and enjoyment of our children and our children's children is our present goal.

I speak officially for the people of Philadelphia, and I am certain that I voice the feelings of all Americans when I extend heartfelt thanks and congratulations to the United States Marines for their heroic achievements of the past, together with our prayers and best wishes for future glory, which, under God, will be theirs.

Mr. Kirkland: Thank you, Mayor Samuel. This Society has long been dedicated to the preservation of traditions and the commemoration of events which have marked the growth and development of
our great nation. This day is an anniversary which means much to
the City of Philadelphia. For it was a Philadelphian, Captain
Samuel Nicholas, who led the heroic Marines on their first overseas
expedition. In fact, the Marine Corps itself was born in Philadelphia,
not far from the site on which we are now assembled. We in Phila-
delphia are delighted to have this opportunity of welcoming our
distinguished guest of honor, Major General Vandergrift. To intro-
duce our guest of honor, it is my privilege to call on a high ranking
officer of the Marine Corps who has served with him for many years.
In presenting General Denig I would be remiss if I failed to mention
that, as Director of the Division of Public Relations of the Corps, he
was responsible for developing a comprehensive system of reporting
the achievements of this famous group of fighting men. The men in
General Denig’s organization are the combat correspondents whose
stories you hear and read daily. I now present Brigadier General
Robert L. Denig, who will in turn introduce our very honored
guest. General Denig.

General Denig: It is perhaps more appropriate for a member of
the Marine Corps, than it would be for a member of any of the
armed forces, to say “It is good to be back in Philadelphia.” We
came from here, so to speak, a little more than one hundred and
sixty-seven years ago. The wonderful tribute which you people are
paying to the Marines here today makes us more than proud of
the fact.

My assignment on this program is a very pleasant one—and one
that makes me very happy and proud. There is a saying among
service men, you know, that an Army squad is composed of eight
men whereas a squad of Marines is composed of seven men and a
press agent. I am sure you will agree with me that the man I am
about to introduce needs no press agent. His courageous leadership
of the Marine Corps operations in the Solomons has endeared him
to the heart of every American—just as it has won him the nation’s
highest military recognition, the Congressional Medal of Honor. I
am greatly honored at this time to present your guest of honor,
Major General Alexander A. Vandergrift of the United States
Marine Corps.
General Vandergrift: It was just one hundred and sixty-seven years ago tonight that Captain Samuel Nicholas ordered the first Marines to "march." The date of their first landing operation was to be almost four months to the day after the first Marine was enlisted, and just a trifle less than four months before the United States became a nation through signing the Declaration of Independence. It never occurred to me before in exactly those terms, but multiples of the figure "four" would seem to have some mystic significance in the destiny of the Marine Corps.

Remember Pearl Harbor? December 7 was the date. The following August 7, eight months later to the day, the Marines stormed the beaches of the southern Solomon Islands. Eight short months those were, when you consider that the Navy had sustained the greatest damage in its proud history, that we had suffered with them tremendous personal losses not easily replaced. A Navy miraculously rebuilt carried us there and supported us there through four months of the most sustained front-line action modern troops have ever been called upon to face.

Nor were the Navy and Marine Corps alone in this operation. The Army supported us throughout, first by long-distance bombing of the enemy's bases to cover our movement, subsequently by air and ground reinforcements on Guadalcanal itself. To me the most striking feature of that entire campaign is the way the several branches of the service, and the men of the land, sea and air within each of them, were able to put aside superficial differences and work toward the common end in one of the most splendid examples of teamwork in our history—or any nation's history, for that matter.

In the case of the Marine Corps, the cooperation on Guadalcanal was simply an honored tradition carried out to unprecedented lengths. From the beginning of our history, our missions have seen us teamed up time and again with one branch of the armed forces or another.

When Captain Samuel Nicholas led his hundred-odd men ashore in the Bahamas in what was to be the Corps' first of more than one hundred and eighty landing operations, he was on a naval mission, functioning as part of the Navy. But in less than a year this same Nicholas led those same men, augmented by more recent enlistments, across the Delaware, where they fought in the Trenton-Princeton campaign side by side with the Army under General Washington.
In the War of 1812 Marines participated in all the ship duels and fleet actions with the Navy; then came ashore and fought with the Army under General Jackson at New Orleans. They fought the Barbary Pirates without a United States soldier within three thousand miles; then, later, took on the Creek and Seminole Indians much farther inland than any sailor of that day ever ventured. They operated with the Navy against the Mexican west coast in 1845-47 and stormed the “Halls of Montezuma” with General Scott’s army, of which they were an integral part during that campaign.

So it has gone throughout every war in United States history, until the complexities of today’s global warfare finds the Marines being landed in boats manned by the Coast Guard to fight simultaneously with both the Army and Navy.

There is no implication of disparagement of Marine Corps functions to admit that on the far-flung battlefronts of today we are not entirely sufficient unto ourselves. Our mission is as important as it ever was; more so, when you consider the scope of current operations. It has simply become a component of a vastly greater mission involving the entire might of the nation.

We have no intention of losing our identity in this effort, or in any way jeopardizing our traditions. The extraordinary esprit de corps which has been the hallmark of the United States Marines for generations is as alive and vital today as at any time in the past.

Probably most of you here have at least heard of our “boot”—or recruit—camps: Parris Island, South Carolina, and San Diego, California. They are not exactly comparable to any other institutions in the world. From them come fabulous tales to strike terror into the hapless recruit—who usually manages to emerge with even better tales at the end of his sojourn there.

Boot camp is where the twig is bent and the Marine made. There the recruit learns discipline and drill, how to march and how to shoot. But he learns a great deal more, though of a less tangible nature; those traditions which combine to make the Marine what he is—not quite like any other fighting man.

Every street on those posts is named for a place; a place where the Marines have served. There is Bataan Avenue, Argonne Boulevard, Bladensburg Street, Santiago Avenue, Belleau Wood Drive. Those streets are a roll of honor—Marine honor. Seeing those signs
brings to the recruit consciousness of being a part of something far greater than himself. Perhaps he exaggerates his feeling of pride in his walk and his talk, but when the pinch comes he has the added incentive of feeling that he must measure up to a priceless heritage. Measure up he will, as have successive generations of his predecessors before him. Implicit confidence in these men of his lies behind the grimly prophetic words of our Commandant, Lieutenant General Thomas L. Holcomb, spoken in the first dark days of this war: “All that we have lost we will regain; all we have suffered we will repay—many times over.”

Guadalcanal is history now, so far as the Marine Corps is concerned. But soon the Marines will be marching again, spearheading again the offensive that began last August 7. The Navy will take us there, the Coast Guard will help us land, and the Army will join their forces with ours, while the air arms of all branches will fight in the sky above us. We in the Marine Corps take pride in realizing that we have done our part to make this magnificent teamwork possible.

Mr. Kirkland: Thank you, General Vandergrift. May I say, again, that we are greatly honored by your presence here today. In your very interesting remarks, you referred to Captain Samuel Nicholas, leader of the first overseas expedition of the Marine Corps which set forth just one hundred and sixty-seven years ago today. To my right, you will see a yellow flag, written on it, “Don’t tread on me.” This is a replica of what was probably the first flag of the American Navy and the Marine Corps. It is certainly the official flag that was raised by Lieutenant John Paul Jones on January 1, 1776, when Commodore Hopkins boarded the Alfred, flagship of the little fleet. It is possible that Manley had used the Pine Tree flag before this, but if he did, it was not on a ship authorized by the Continental Congress. It is now my privilege to introduce to you two young women who are direct descendants of that intrepid officer, Captain Nicholas—Mrs. Otto R. Spies and Mrs. Edward B. Tryon. Mrs. Spies and Mrs. Tryon, acting for the historic Nicholas family, desire to present to the Marine Corps, through you, General Vandergrift, a document which is of special significance in connection with this anniversary observance. Mrs. Tryon will act as spokesman for the family. Mrs. Tryon.
IN CONGRESS.

The Delightes of the United Colonies of New-Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Rhode-Island, Connecticut, New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, the counties of New-Castle, Kent, and Sussex on Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North-Carolina, South-Carolina, and Georgia, to

Samuel Nicholas Esquire

We, repeating especial Trust and Confidence in your Patience, Valour, Conduct and Fidelity,

Do by these Presents, constitute and appoint you to be Captain of Marines

in the Service of the Thirteen United Colonies of North-America, fitted out for the defence of American Liberty, and for repelling every hostile Invasion thereof. You are therefore carefully and diligently to discharge the Duty of Captain of Marines, by doing and performing all Manner of Things thereunto belonging. And we do strictly charge and require all Officers, Marines and Seamen under your Command, to be obedient to your Orders as Captain of Marines. And you are to observe and follow such Orders and Directions from Time to Time, as you shall receive from this or a future Congress of the United Colonies, or Committee of Congress, for that Purpose appointed, or Officer in Chief for the Time being of the Navy of the United Colonies, or any other your superior Officer, according to the Rules and Discipline of War, the Usage of the Seas, and the Instructions herewith given you, in Pursuance of the Trust reposed in you. This Commission to continue in Force until revoked by this or a future Congress.

By Order of the Congress

President.

The commission issued by the Continental Congress to Samuel Nicholas, November 28, 1775
MRS. TRYON: General Vandergrift, in recognition of all that the Marine Corps has accomplished in the past one hundred and sixty-seven years, and what it is doing today on the far-flung battlefronts of the world, my sister and I ask that you accept for the Corps a document which has been until now in the continuous possession of one or another of the direct descendants of Samuel Nicholas. It is the original commission issued to the Captain by the Continental Congress on November 28, 1775. (Mrs. Tryon hands the commission to General Vandergrift.)

GENERAL VANDERGRIFT: Thank you, Mrs. Tryon. With your permission, I should like to entrust the commission to the care of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania to be preserved and exhibited together with other historical documents of the same period in the Society's possession. (General Vandergrift hands the commission to Mr. Kirkland.)

MR. KIRKLAND: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania is proud to be entrusted with the care and safekeeping of this priceless document. We, too, are grateful for this honor and for the opportunity given us on this day to pay homage to the Marine Corps and its renowned traditions. It is nice to realize that the commission that was issued to the Marine Officer who led the first overseas expedition, is now deposited with our Society by the distinguished officer who has led the most recent one.

ANNOUNCER: You have been listening to the ceremonies held in connection with the commemoration of the first overseas expedition by an American armed force, which departed from Reedy’s Island, near Philadelphia, one hundred and sixty-seven years ago today. The ceremonies have been held in the Hall of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, located at 1300 Locust Street, Philadelphia. Present for the exercises were Major General Alexander A. Vandergrift and other high ranking officers of the United States Marine Corps, city and state officials, and members of The Historical Society.