# Short Essay: Evan Kolodziejczak

## The U.S. Marine Corps Fight for Survival in Philadelphia

The United States Marine Corps takes its history, or at least the legend of its history, very seriously. As the nation's smallest service, and one that has consistently come under scrutiny as being redundant, the Marine Corps ensures that its brand remains strong in the nation's popular imagination.[1] The Marine Corps relies on its heritage and its public image to maintain its existence and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania has become a heritage hot spot for the Marine Corps and its efforts to maintain relevance through interpreting the past. The City of Philadelphia has become a cornerstone in the Marine Corps' origin story and heritage legacy. Despite having a relatively small Marine Corps presence in terms of active units stationed in proximity to the city, the service has intertwined its history with the "City of Brotherly Love." When Philadelphia was an active Navy Yard, the Marine Corps presence in the city was substantial. In the early twentieth century, the Marine Corps' key training facilities and officer schools were run out of the Marine Barracks on Broad Street. Indeed, many of the officers who would command Marine units in the Pacific Theater during the Second World War received much of their formal instruction in officership in Philadelphia.[2] The city has also been the birthplace and hometown of countless Marines. One of the most notable Marines from the Philadelphia area was Major General Smedley Darlington Butler. The recipient of two Medals of Honor, Butler was later an outspoken critic of U.S. foreign interventions upon retiring from the military and famously referred to himself as a "gangster of capitalism" when referencing his overseas service.[3] Prior to retirement, Butler served as Philadelphia's Commissioner of Public Safety for two years beginning in 1924 at the request of Mayor Freeland Kendrick.[4]

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1 For a detailed account of a concerted effort to disband the U.S. Marine Corps and the justification for its continued existence see, Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight: An inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps*, 2. print (Naval Inst. Pr, 1985).

2 Jennifer L. Mazzara, *Shared Experience: Organizational Culture and Ethos at the U.S. Marine Corps Basic School, 1924-1941*, First edition, 2022 (Marine Corps University Press, 2023).

3 Smedley D. Butler, *War Is a Racket*, Reprint edition (Dauphin Publications, 2018).

4 Butler would leave a disputed legacy both in the Marine Corps and in Philadelphia. For an account of Butler, his exploits, and his legacy see, Jonathan M. Katz,

These connections notwithstanding, the most celebrated aspect of the Marine Corps' history in Philadelphia has to do with the Corps' creation. On November 10th, 1775, the Continental Congress resolved to create two Battalions of Marines and appointed Captain (later Major) Samuel Nichols, a Philadelphia native, the service's first officer and its Commandant. Nichols began his recruiting efforts to fill his levy in *Tun Tavern* at South Front and Samson Street.[5] It is highly likely that every living individual that has once worn a Marine uniform can recall instantly on demand that the U.S Marine Corps was founded on November 10th, 1775, in *Tun Tavern*, Philadelphia. This "fact" is drilled into every recruit and candidate. Every year, Marines typically celebrate the founding of the Marine Corps with more fervor than their own birth celebrations. Despite the fact that the modern day Marine Corps was established by an act of Congress on July 11, 1798, Marines today will still point to the original continental recruiting post and gleefully remark that the Corps' was "born in a bar".[6]

Today, only a historic marker denotes the site of *Tun Tavern*, yet efforts are underway to "rebuild" the site as both a shrine to the Marine Corps and a functioning watering hole. In 2025, the 250th "anniversary" of the Marine Corps' founding, fundraising efforts for the tavern rebuilding project intensified and aligned with commemoration events throughout the city.[7]

*Photo courtesy of Marcella Aline Toledo*

Today, the Marine Corps is conducting a transformational change in its operational design and is again under threat from policy experts who might view the service as redundant and unnecessary.[8] It is therefore

*Gangsters of Capitalism: Smedley Butler, the Marines, and the Making and Breaking of America's Empire*, First St. Martin's Griffin Edition: 2023 (St. Martin's Griffin, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2023).

5 Jason Q. Bohm, *Washington's Marines: The Origins of the Corps and the American Revolution, 1775-1777* (Savas Beatie, 2023).

6 Ibid.

7 "Homecoming 250," https://www.homecoming250.org/.

8 "Force Design Update," https://www.marines.mil/Force-Design/.

*Image: "Tun Tavern, Philadelphia." Published 8/19/74. Box: 26. George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Photograph Collection, Philadelphia Subjects, SCRC 170B. Temple University Libraries: Special Collections Research Center.*

probable that the Corps' history in the City of Philadelphia will continue to be a crucial part of its heritage and increasingly support its justification to exist.

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*Courtesy of the Special Collections Research Center. Temple University Libraries. Philadelphia, PA.*

*Image: "Tun Tavern, Philadelphia." Published 8/19/74. Box: 26. George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Photograph Collection, Philadelphia Subjects, SCRC 170B. Temple University Libraries: Special Collections Research Center.*