

History of the Marines' Hymn

-The Marine's Hymn-

Following the war with the Barbary Pirates in 1805, when Lieutenant P.N. O'Bannon and his small force of Marines participated in the capture of Derne and hoisted the American flag for the first time over a fortress of the Old World, the Colors of the Corps was inscribed with the words: "To the Shores of Tripoli." After the Marines had participated in the capture and occupation of Mexico City and the Castle of Chapultepec, otherwise known as the "Halls of Montezuma," the words on the Colors were changed to read: "From the Shores of Tripoli to the Halls of Montezuma." Following the close of the Mexican War came the first verse of the Marines' Hymn, written, according to tradition, by a Marine on duty in Mexico. For the sake of euphony, the unknown author transposed the phrases in the motto on the Colors so that the first two lines of the Hymn would read: "From the Halls of Montezuma, To the Shores of Tripoli."

A serious attempt to trace the tune of the Marines' Hymn to its source is revealed in correspondence between Colonel A.S. McLemore, USMC, and Walter F. Smith, second leader of the Marine Band. Colonel McLemore wrote: "Major Richard Wallach, USMC, says that in 1878, when he was in Paris, France, the aria to which the Marines' Hymn is now sung was a very popular one." The name of the opera and a part of the chorus was secured from Major Wallach and forwarded to Mr. Smith, who replied: "Major Wallach is to be congratulated upon a wonderfully accurate musical memory, for the aria of the Marine Hymn is certainly to be found in the opera, 'Genevieve de Brabant'...The melody is not in the exact form of the Marine Hymn, but is undoubtedly the aria from which it was taken. I am informed, however, by one of the members of the band, who has a Spanish wife, that the aria was one familiar to her childhood and it may, therefore, be a Spanish folk song."

In a letter to Major Harold F. Wingman, USMC, dated 18 July [1919], John Philip Sousa wrote: "The melody of the 'Halls of Montezuma' is taken from Offenbach's comic opera, 'Genevieve de Brabant' and is sung by two gendarmes." Most people believe that the aria of the Marines' Hymn was, in fact, taken from "Genevieve de Brabant," an opera-bouffe (a farcical form of opera, generally termed musical comedy) composed by Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880), and presented at the Theatre de Bouffes Parisiens, Paris, on November 19, 1859.

Offenbach was born in Cologne, Germany, June 20, 1819 and died October 5, 1880. He studied music from an early age and in 1838 entered the Paris Conservatoire as a student. In 1834 he was admitted as a violoncellist to the Opera Comique and soon attained much popularity with Parisien audiences. He became conductor of the Theatre Francais in 1847 and subsequently leased the Theatre Comte, which he reopened as the Bouffes-Parisiens. Most of his operas are classed as comic (light and fanciful) and include numerous popular

productions, many of which still hold a high place in European and American countries.

Genevieve de Brabant was the wife of Count Siegfried of Brabant. Brabant, a district in the central lowlands of Holland and Belgium, formerly constituted an independent duchy. The southern portions were inhabited by Walloons, a class of people now occupying the southeastern part of Belgium, especially the provinces of Liege, Arlon and Namur.

Every campaign the Marines have taken part in gives birth to an unofficial verse. For example, the following from Iceland:

"Again in nineteen forty-one
We sailed a north'ard course
And found beneath the midnight sun,
The Viking and the Norse.
The Iceland girls were slim and fair,
And fair the Iceland scenes,
And the Army found in landing there,
The United States Marines."

Copyright ownership of the Marines' Hymn was vested in the United States Marine Corps per certificate of registration dated August 19, 1991 but is now in the public domain. In 1929, the Commandant of the Marine Corps authorized the following verses of the Marines' Hymn as the official version:

**"From the Halls of Montezuma
To the Shores of Tripoli;
We fight our country's battles
In the air on land and sea;
First to fight for right and freedom
And to keep our honor clean;
We are proud to claim the title
of United States Marine.**

**"Our flag's unfurled to every breeze
From dawn to setting sun;
We have fought in ev'ry clime and place
Where we could take a gun;
In the snow of far-off Northern lands
And in sunny tropic scenes;
You will find us always on the job--
The United States Marines.**

"Here's health to you and to our Corps

**Which we are proud to serve
In many a strife we've fought for life
And never lost our nerve;**

**If the Army and the Navy
Ever look on Heaven's scenes;
They will find the streets are guarded
By United States Marines."**

Former Gunnery Sergeant H.L. Tallman, veteran observer in Marine Corps Aviation who participated in many combat missions with Marine Corps Aviation over the Western Front in World War I, first proposed the change at a meeting of the First Marine Aviation Force Veterans Association in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Many interesting stories have been associated with the Marines' Hymn. One of the best was published in the Stars and Stripes, the official newspaper of the AEF, under date of August 16, 1918. "A wounded officer from among the gallant French lancers had just been carried into a Yankee field hospital to have his dressing changed. He was full of compliments and curiosity about the dashing contingent that fought at his regiment's left. "A lot of them are mounted troops by this time,' he explained, 'for when our men would be shot from their horses, these youngsters would give one running jump and gallop ahead as cavalry. I believe they are soldiers from Montezuma. At least, when they advanced this morning, they were all singing "From the Halls of Montezuma to the Shores of Tripoli." The Marines' Hymn has been sung and played in all of the four corners of the earth and today is recognized as one of the foremost service songs.