

## **Marines at the Battle of Gettysburg—1922**



Story by Kenneth L. Smith-Christmas  
USMC photos

**O**n 20 June 1922, most of the Marine Corps' East Coast Expeditionary Force boarded barges on the wharf at Quantico, Va., and sailed up the Potomac River to Washington, D.C., heading for the Civil War battlefield of Gettysburg, Pa. This was the second of four reenactments that the Marine Corps staged in the early 1920s, under the initiative of the legendary Marine, Smedley D. Butler.

Joined at the East Potomac Park by the motorized section of the column the next day, the full brigade marched to Gettysburg, by way of Frederick, Md., camping on some of the same grounds that would be used two years later during its march to a reenactment at the Antietam battlefield.

The main purpose of these reenactments was to provide training for the Marine brigade, then consisting of the 5th Marines



**During the Marines' movement to Gettysburg for the 1922 reenactment, both Union and Confederate veterans mingled with the Marines when they passed through Emmitsburg, Md., as they did at all four of the reenactments in the 1920s.**



**Above:** The Marine camp at Gettysburg was established in the field behind the peace monument that had been erected for the 50th anniversary of the battle. The camp included a flying field, which accommodated Martin heavy bombers, DeHavilland light bombers and Vought pursuit aircraft.

**Left:** During their stay in Gettysburg, the Marines took part in a number of historical tours of the battlefield. This group is gathered in the formidable rock formation at "Devil's Den," the scene of bloody fighting during the second day of the battle.

## Marine Corps Mechanization

Prior to World War I, the Marine Corps embraced mechanization and used a few trucks and automobiles in the Haitian and Santo Dominican campaigns of 1915 and 1916. By WW I, the Corps was experimenting with armored cars and was using armored tractors to pull its artillery, but none of these vehicles made it overseas with the 4th Marine Brigade.

The exception was the original "Tin Lizzie," the Model T Ford light truck that had been donated by three patriotic New York socialites: Mrs. Elizabeth Pearce, Mrs. Charles Childs and a Miss Willard. The Marines at Quantico, Va., promptly named it "Miss Elizabeth Ford," and it saw heroic service in France. (When the name was painted on the side of the vehicle, it was misspelled as "Elizabeth.")

After the war, Marines established a platoon of light M1917 U.S. "Six Ton Tractor" tanks at Quantico, and this platoon later went to Tientsin, China, with Brigadier General Smedley D. Butler's 3d Brigade in 1927. Meanwhile, the Marine Corps was assembling a wide variety of wheeled vehicles, to include the famed "Liberty Trucks" of WW I fame, as well as



**American 6-ton light tanks, based on the French Renault FT17 of WW I, were demonstrated at Gettysburg. These tanks, crewed by two men, had either an M1919 Browning .30-caliber machine gun or a 37 mm M1916 Puteaux gun in their turrets, while a few were configured as "signal" tanks, as seen here.**

"FWD" trucks made by the Four Wheel Drive Auto Co., in addition to motorcycles and other automobiles.

Photographs of the Gettysburg maneuver show all of these vehicles in use during the event.

—Kenneth L. Smith-Christmas





The highlight was the reenactment of Pickett's Charge, which originally had taken place on the last day of the battle, 3 July 1863. Marines created their field hats and wore blanket rolls over their shoulders to approximate the appearance of Civil War soldiers.

infantry in this reenactment, while then-Major Roy T. Geiger commanded the aviation forces. At the conclusion of the maneuvers, the full brigade paraded in Washington for a review by the Secretary of the Navy.

Major General John A. Lejeune, 13th Commandant of the Marine Corps, halted the program in 1925 because of the costs involved, but Williams revived the series of reenactments in the late 1930s.

(infantry), the 10th Marines (artillery) and battalions of attached engineers, signalers and medical corps, as well as detachments of aviation, chemical units and tanks.

For the Gettysburg reenactment, the brigade was augmented by detachments from Marine Barracks Washington and from seagoing Marines temporarily stationed at the nearby Washington Navy Yard. Then-Brigadier General Butler, commanding what was then known as Marine Barracks Quantico, staged these

events not only as a proving ground for new innovations in the Corps, but also as a way to gain publicity for a Marine Corps that was confronted with severe budgetary constraints.

As was the case with the first three of these annual reenactments, the Marines re-created scenarios from Civil War battles, in addition to showcasing the current military technology being utilized by the Marine Corps at that time. Then-Colonel Dion Williams commanded the

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## Captain George W. Hamilton

Captain George W. Hamilton was one of the Marine Corps' unsung heroes of World War I. According to his biographer, Mark Mortensen, in "George W. Hamilton, USMC: America's Greatest World War I Hero," Hamilton should have been awarded three Medals of Honor for his exploits with the 4th Marine Brigade, but instead only received the Navy Cross and the Army's Distinguished Service Cross.

Controversy and speculation surround the denial of the recognition that he so richly deserved, and this may be one of

the reasons that he left the Corps at the end of the war. Hamilton's senior officer, Colonel Logan Feland, tried to dissuade him from leaving the Corps and cited his many achievements, including the attack that Hamilton had led over the Meuse River on the last night of the war, in a letter from Feland's Santo Domingo headquarters in 1920.

After spending a few months in the business world, Hamilton returned to the Marine Corps in a little more than a year and, almost immediately, began training as an aviator. By the spring of 1922, he was commanding a squadron of DeHavilland DH-4B aircraft at Quantico, Va.'s Brown Field.

A demonstration of the Marine Corps' aviation capabilities was one of the highlights of each Civil War reenactment, and Gettysburg was to be no exception.

Taking off from Quantico on 26 June 1922, Hamilton and his rear seat gunner/observer, Gunnery Sergeant George R. Martin, appeared over the battlefield at 1300 and, after some mock fighting with the other aircraft of the Second Squadron, attempted to land. Hamilton's aircraft (Bureau Number 6157) began to shake, probably due to air turbulence, and crashed nose first. Hamilton was killed instantly and Martin later died at the hospital.

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Pieces of the wreckage of Capt George W. Hamilton's aircraft are piled around this communications vehicle, and his body is under the canvas tarp. Hamilton and his gunner/observer were the only fatalities on the 1922 maneuver.