

A History of Collaboration: The U.S. Marine Corps & U.S. Department of State

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Semper Fidelis

From the Continental Marines safeguarding diplomats during the Revolutionary War to the modern-day Marine Security Guards (MSG) stationed at U.S. embassies worldwide, the United States Marine Corps (USMC) has played a critical and evolving role in ensuring the protection of Department of State personnel, classified material, and U.S. property. This nearly two and a half century collaboration between the USMC and the Department has adapted to changing geopolitical landscapes and the growing complexity of international relations. It remains a model of interagency collaboration and mutually supporting missions. Former Secretary of State George P. Shultz, who served as a Marine in the Pacific theater in World War II, perhaps stated the history of interagency collaboration between the Marines and the Department most clearly: "The Marines and our diplomacy are tightly intertwined. Sometimes people have the mistaken idea that the strength represented by the Marines is an alternative to diplomacy. That's wrong. Strength and diplomacy go together. They need each other."[1]

Origins: The Continental Marines and Early Protection of Diplomats in Transit

The collaboration between Marines and U.S. diplomats predates the formal establishment of both the USMC and the Department of State. The Continental Marines, established on November 10, 1775, were the precursors to the modern Marine Corps. One of the many contributions of these Marines, ashore and afloat, during the Revolutionary War was the protection of American diplomats transiting the Atlantic to secure alliances and negotiate treaties. A notable example occurred in early 1778 as John Adams traveled aboard the *Boston* to join Benjamin Franklin and Arthur Lee in France as part of a three-person commission to negotiate the alliance with France that was of pivotal importance to the outcome of the war. As the *Boston* encountered a heavily armed British ship in the mid-Atlantic, the ship's captain ordered Adams below the deck, Marine sharpshooters up in the masts, and other Marines to be prepared to repel boarders or assault the other ship. When the British ship surrendered, the captain was surprised to see Adams had emerged from the safety of below deck and had joined the Marines, musket in hand. Adams commented to the captain, "I ought to do my share of fighting."[2] While the Continental Marines were primarily a military force on land and at sea during the war, their role in safeguarding diplomats underscored the importance of protecting U.S. representatives in and transiting to foreign lands. This early collaboration set the precedent for the Marines' involvement in U.S. diplomacy. As the United States expanded its presence on the global stage, the need for a reliable force to protect its diplomats and citizens became increasingly apparent.

Semper Fidelis

The Nineteenth Century: Protecting U.S. Consulates and Citizens Abroad

The permanent establishment of the U.S. Department of State in July 1789 and the United States Marine Corps in July 1798 ushered in an era of periodic collaboration between the Department and the USMC. As the nineteenth century unfolded, the United States expanded foreign commerce and established consulates and diplomatic missions in various parts of the world, often in regions experiencing political instability. The Marines became critical assets in protecting these outposts, ensuring the safety of U.S. personnel and property. Marines have guarded diplomatic facilities and acted as security forces for diplomatic missions since the Quasi-War with France (1798–1801). The best-known example of this was the deployment of naval squadron with accompanying Marines to North Africa during the Barbary Wars (1801–1815), which began when U.S. merchants in the region faced threats from piracy and local unrest. When the U.S. Government refused to pay a higher tribute to continue transiting and trading in the region, the pasha of Tripoli ordered the flagstaff in front of the U.S. Consulate removed and the U.S. consul, William Eaton, expelled from the country. When the USS *Philadelphia* ran aground, the pasha's forces imprisoned the entire crew, including 45 Marines. Eaton then led an expeditionary force of over 300 men that included Lieutenant Presley O'Bannon and seven other Marines on a 950-kilometer overland march that concluded with the celebrated land/sea assault on Derna on "the shores of Tripoli" in 1805. After two hours of vicious, often hand-to-hand fighting, the Marines led the force that seized the fortress and Derna, planted the American flag, and drove off a counterattack with a bayonet charge. Operating under the direction of Consul Eaton, the Marines led the iconic assault in support of a broader operation that freed Americans held captive, reinstated a pro-American leader, reopened U.S. trade and re-established the U.S. consular presence in Tripoli.

When Commodore Perry first landed in Japan, two companies of Marines in their dress blue coats and white trousers formed a procession that prompted Perry to later reflect: "I could not conceive of a more beautiful pageant."

During the first half of the 1800s, Marine detachments aboard Navy frigates continued to serve as armed escorts for U.S. diplomatic and trade representatives transiting to their consular posts or seeking to open trade relations. In 1832, President Andrew Jackson dispatched Consul Edmund Roberts, known as "America's First Diplomat to Asia," to negotiate trade treaties with Cochin China (Vietnam), Siam (Thailand), and Oman. Marine detachments accompanied Roberts ashore in all three countries as he sought to negotiate treaties of friendship and commerce.[3] Marines later provided security ashore for diplomats attempting to establish relations with China, Japan, and Korea. Marines provided diplomatic security in China from the opening of the first U.S. Consulate in 1844 in the port city of Macao. A squad of Marines from the USS *Brandywine* accompanied the first U.S. Minister to China, Caleb Cushing, as he arrived ashore, and provided him security for the next two months.

The Headquarters of the Marine Corps selected an elite detachment of Marines to accompany Commodore Matthew Perry's 1852–1854 mission to open relations with Japan. Issued new uniforms, these Marines conducted repetitive manual of arms drills on the East Lawn of the U.S. Capitol, accompanied by the Marine Band and a crowd of curious onlookers.[4]



Landing of Commodore Perry, Officers and Men of the Squadron, to Meet the Imperial Commissioners at Yokuhama, Japan, March 8th 1854. (National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of August Belmont IV)

When Perry first landed in Japan, two companies of Marines in their dress blue coats and white trousers formed a procession that prompted Perry to later reflect: "I could not conceive of a more beautiful pageant." One observer described the landing, "...the Marines, whose orderly ranks in complete military appointment, with their blue and white uniforms, and glistening bayonets, made quite a martial and effective show." After a dinner in Yokohama in March 1854, a company-sized drill team of Marines performed for Japanese commissioners the routine they had practiced on the East Lawn of the Capitol.

The commissioners commented on their "soldierly air and excellent discipline of their men." The Japanese reciprocated with a troupe of Sumo wrestlers who impressed the Marines with their size and discipline. Perry's mission culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Peace, Commerce, and Navigation that soon led to the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the United States and Japan. Marines returned to conduct drills and guard the U.S. Consulate for a year after its establishment in the port of Shimoda.

Protecting U.S. Diplomats and Overseas Interests in the Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries: Marines as Diplomatic Guards

Increasing U.S. trade and strategic interests in East Asia and Latin America in the latter half of the nineteenth century coincided with political instability in both regions. These developments increased the combined activities of the Department and the USMC in each area. Marines soon found themselves at the forefront of diplomatic and consulate security during this era, guarding legations and consulates and protecting American and foreign citizens. The Marines deployed frequently in Latin America during the early-twentieth century. Marines received the mission to protect U.S. consulates and ensure the safety of U.S. nationals amidst political instability in places such as the Dominican Republic (1903) and Nicaragua (1912–1933).

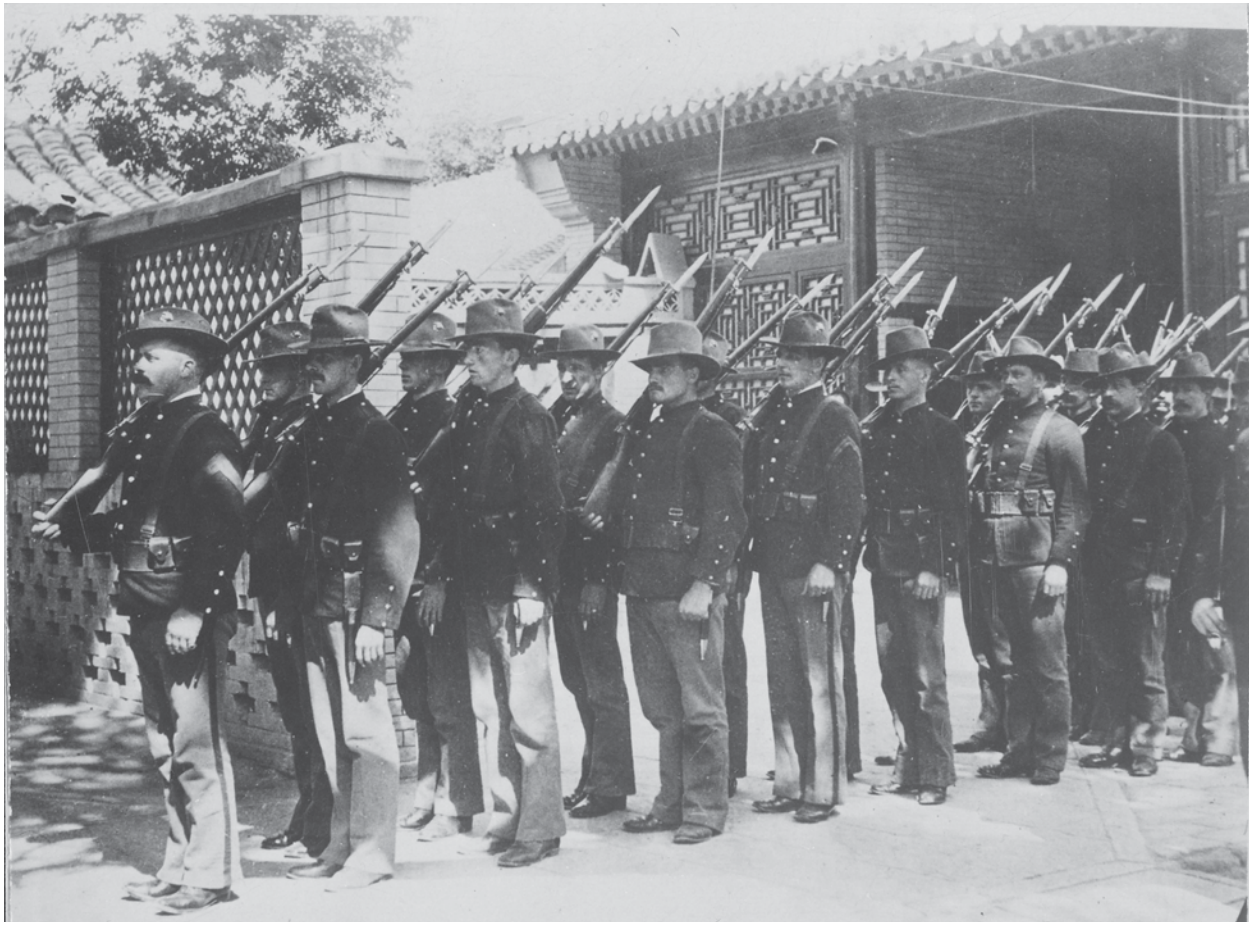
Starting in 1894, Marines and sailors of the Asiatic Squadron landed in China six times over the next 40 years. A rise in anti-foreigner sentiment in China in 1898 prompted the U.S. Minister to China, Edwin H. Conger, to request the establishment of a Marine legation guard at both the U.S. Legation in Beijing and the U.S. Consulate in Tianjin. The Marine guard at Beijing became the first permanent legation guard to be established by the Department. Even greater unrest occurred during the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901). During this uprising, anti-foreign sentiment led to assaults on foreign nationals and diplomatic missions. Marines deployed as part of the International Relief Expedition to relieve and protect the besieged foreign legation quarter in Beijing. A platoon of Marines inside the quarter built a 4-foot barricade that they were ordered to defend at all costs to protect the legation compound. The Boxers built a tower that enabled them to rain down fire on the Marines and their international allies. In a bold and aggressive nighttime attack, the Marines overcame a swarm of Chinese small-arms fire to destroy the Boxer stronghold. They later maneuvered around the main Chinese positions into their rear, forcing them to retreat and loosen their siege until being reinforced by the relief expedition that included 511.[5] Thirty-three Marines earned Medals of Honor for their actions during the expedition and the 55-day siege. In U.S. Minister Conger's report of these events to Secretary of State John Hay, Conger wrote: "To our Marines fell the most difficult and dangerous portion. I cannot close this dispatch without gratefully mentioning the splendid service performed by the United States Marines."[6]

A Core Departmental Mission for the Corps: The Protection of Classified Information

Although the primary mission of the Marine Corps in support of American diplomatic missions has been the protection of U.S. personnel and property, an important secondary mission that has evolved over time has been the protection of classified information. Prior to the establishment of the Marine Security Guard program following World War II, Marines focused on protecting classified information in transit. These activities became especially important in wartime.

The wartime activities of Marines acting as diplomatic couriers accelerated with First Lieutenant Archibald Gillespie's service prior to the war between the United States and Mexico (1846–1848). Appointed as a special agent of the Department and an executive agent of President Polk, Gillespie delivered coded messages from the President and the Secretary of State to the U.S. Consul in Monterey, Mexico (Thomas O. Larkin) as well as Captain Fremont in Oregon and the Commander of the Pacific Squadron operating off the California coast.

One of the most unique chapters of USMC collaboration with the Department occurred



Marines in relief party, Peiping, China, 1900 Boxer Rebellion. (National Archives and Records Administration)

during WWI when it requested a detail of Marines for assignment to duty as United States diplomatic couriers. The Marine assigned to courier duty worked under the direct supervision of the various U.S. ambassadors and ministers then stationed throughout Europe. During the U.S. involvement in the war, armed Marines in civilian clothes accompanied each sack of diplomatic and confidential dispatches between the U.S. and diplomatic missions across Europe.

During World War II, Marines made their greatest wartime contributions in combat in the Pacific theater of operations. A few veteran Marine noncommissioned officers also served as diplomatic couriers for the Department. In a program reminiscent of the one during World War I, Marines who had returned stateside for rest and/or recuperation from combat wounds were recruited to serve as diplomatic couriers to guard Department communications and other confidential materials sent to U.S. embassies and consulates abroad. With the postwar establishment of the Marine Security Guard program, the Marines shifted their focus from protecting the Department's classified information in transit to protecting classified information and equipment held within embassies and consulates. The protection of classified material remains a core part of the Marine Corps Security Guard program's mission statement.[7]

World War II and the Early Cold War: The Expansion of Diplomatic Security and the Marine Security Guard Program

The outbreak of World War II, its expansion to multiple theaters and increased U.S. global engagement in the years following the war increased the size and scope of collaboration between the USMC and the Department of State. Marines provided security for increasing numbers of U.S. military and diplomatic personnel, ministers, ambassadors, and other representatives of the United States abroad. The purview of these Marine guards also expanded to include securing U.S. buildings and classified information overseas.

As the U.S. diplomatic presence grew in numbers, geographic footprint, and ambition following WWII, the need for robust diplomatic security became more critical than ever. The Department concluded that given the onset of the Cold War with the Soviet Union and decolonization in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, a permanent and more dependable military presence was necessary to ensure security of embassies and diplomatic personnel worldwide. This led to one of the most significant developments in the history of USMC-Department of State collaboration—the establishment of the Marine Security Guard (MSG) program in 1948. This program formalized the role of Marines in diplomatic security, creating a dedicated force to protect U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide as the threat of espionage and terrorism became a significant concern, particularly in regions where U.S. diplomatic missions were targeted by hostile actors. Marines stationed at embassies and consulates played a critical role in countering these threats and ensuring the safety of both U.S. personnel and classified information.

In early January 1949, 83 Marines were assigned to the Foreign Service Institute for training in the new Marine Security Guard program. By January 28, 1949, fifteen Marines departed for their first assignments: six to Bangkok, Thailand, and nine to Tangier, Morocco. Within two years of the program's inception, approximately 675 Marines served at various embassies and consulates throughout the world. In 1954, the USMC assumed the primary responsibility of training for the MSG program.

These early Marine Security Guards served at the forefront in the defense of U.S. embassies and consulates against invading armies in Korea (1950) and political unrest in Hungary (1956) where they stood guard. Other Marine Security Guards witnessed revolutions and unrest caused by political instability as decolonization in Asia and Africa unfolded.

Marine Security Guard detachments faced immediate challenges due to the outbreak of hostilities in Korea but successfully evacuated the U.S. mission in South Korea. The first Marine Security Guards reported to Seoul in early 1949. That detachment consisted of a handpicked 20-Marine detail. These Marines received training on Korean history, language, and culture even before the Department's MSG course began operating. Their senior noncommissioned officers had all served in China before and after World War II, while each of the sergeants had wartime experience in the Central and South Pacific. They wore civilian clothes and were addressed as "Mister." Operating under the control of the Department, their only distinguishing identification was a special passport colored green. Members of the detachment provided a personal security detail for the ambassador, maintained an operations post at the detachment's mission headquarters in a local hotel, guarded the inside and outside of the embassy, and conducted sweeps for unsecured classified material at the end of each duty day. Detachment Marines in a jeep continually patrolled and visited all embassy-occupied hotels, warehouses, open storage areas, and outlying residencies.



Marine Private First Class Luther Leguire raises the U.S. Flag at the American consulate in Seoul, while fighting for the city raged around the compound, September 27, 1950. (National Archives and Records Administration)

As North Korean forces attacked on the morning of June 25, 1950, detachment Marines swept into action for over 60 continuous hours. Their primary mission became to escort to the port of Inchon and Kimpo airfield convoys of American citizens, embassy staff and their dependents who had been ordered to evacuate. Other Marines destroyed any embassy vehicles that would be left behind. They began the slow and tedious effort of using the embassy's furnace to burn classified documents. After realizing this was taking too long while the amount of classified materials to destroy kept growing, the resourceful Marines built a cage made of chain-link fencing and steel posts to burn the mountain of documents. As North Korean forces drew closer to the embassy, Marines destroyed the embassy switchboard and the embassy code machines. All 20 Marines from the detachment made it safely out and secured the money and classified documents from Seoul with the U.S. Consulate in Kyoto, Japan.[8]

The next major ground war in East Asia proved a daunting test for Marine Security Guards. The staffing of the Marine Security Guard detachment in Saigon, South Vietnam, expanded from six in the early 1960s to 62 Marines in 1966 and eventually became the largest MSG presence in the world. A series of three car bombs at the embassy in the mid-1960s killed scores and wounded hundreds of U.S. citizen and Vietnamese employees, prompting Congress to appropriate the funds to construct a larger, more secure embassy. The constant threat of attacks led to the authorization of combat pay for Marine embassy guards, just like their fellow Marines deployed in line companies. Embassy guards worked forty to seventy hours a week, screening visitors to the embassy and consular section, conducting daily security patrols of the embassy and its environs, and conducting after-hours inspections of the embassy's offices in search of unsecured classified information. The MSGs were instructed to never take the same route twice or visit the same establishment in Saigon more than once.

Opened in 1967, the new embassy faced a tremendous threat during the Tet Offensive in 1968. A reinforced squad of 20 South Vietnamese



Secretary of State Dean Rusk speaks to a graduating class of Marine Security Guards, circa 1960s. (Department of State Records, National Archives and Records Administration)

insurgents [Viet Cong] armed with explosive satchel charges, automatic weapons, rocket-propelled grenades and hand grenades blew a hole in the wall surrounding the embassy and stormed the embassy compound. A rocket-propelled grenade struck the wall just outside of the security post at the building's main entrance, injuring the two MSGs on duty. As enemy grenades entered the embassy through a window, some Marines secured the post, while others evacuated their wounded to the top floor to be medically evacuated from the roof. The medevac flight sustained several rounds of enemy small-arms fire and had to make an emergency landing with the wounded Marines in a rice paddy just outside of Saigon. Several off-duty MSGs worked their way from their quarters to relieve the besieged embassy. The off-duty MSGs combined with an Army MP platoon employed fire and maneuver to first pin down, then attrit the attackers, killing 18 and taking two prisoners. One of the Marines, Corporal James C. Marshall, was killed by an enemy sniper and became the first MSG to die in defense of a U.S. embassy or consulate. Nine other Marines were wounded. Although the well-armed attackers breached the wall and entered the compound, the determined Marines prevented them from setting foot within the embassy building.

Two weeks after the assault on the embassy in Saigon, Secretary of State Dean Rusk told a graduating class from the Marine Security Guard School and their families that "'our' Marines added another luminous chapter to the great history of the Corps. They suddenly were confronted with a situation which called for instant decision, fast action, and steady courage... a situation in which they had to fight to carry out their two-fold mission: the protection of classified material, and the protection of lives and property... I cannot help but feel overwhelming gratitude and pride in the conduct of our Marine Security Guards in Saigon." The Marine Security Guard program benefitted from the lessons learned in the attack. At the local level, the detachment in Saigon received an additional 39 Marines. The attack also prompted the first major expansion and reorganization of the MSG program since its inception in 1948.[9]

Marines continued to guard consulates and embassies after U.S. combat forces withdrew in 1973 and were the last Americans out of Vietnam when Saigon fell two years later. As the government of South Vietnam and its military forces began to collapse in 1975, a Marine task force commanded the operation to evacuate the remaining U.S. personnel by sea and air from the remaining consulates and the embassy in Saigon. Eighteen detachment Marines provided security for U.S. personnel and South Vietnamese allies who were attempting to fly out of nearby Tan Son Nhut Airfield. Enemy artillery and rocket attacks closed the airfield and killed two MSGs, Corporal Charles J. McMahon and Lance Corporal Darwin Judge. These two MSGs became the last America servicemembers to lose their lives in Vietnam. Despite the approaching peril, the remaining MSG detachment at the embassy specifically requested that MSGs would be the "last out of Vietnam." After ensuring that no U.S. citizen under Chief of Misson authority was abandoned and that no classified material fell into enemy hands, eleven Marines boarded the final helicopter that lifted out of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon in 1975. The last American to board was the MSG detachment NCOIC, Master Sergeant Juan J. Valdez.

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The Late-Cold War: A Lethal Period for Marine Security Guards

From 1979 to 1991, attacks on U.S. embassies in places like Tehran, Islamabad, Beirut, San Salvador, and Kuwait claimed the lives of another six Marine Security Guards.[10] Many of these Marine Security Guards, in addition to those who fell in Saigon, are honored by the Department's Diplomatic Security Service Memorial. The greatest challenge to protecting diplomatic facilities and personnel occurred at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran during the Iranian Revolution in 1979. As the revolution unfolded and waves of Iranians breached the diplomatic compound, Marines stationed at the embassy worked tirelessly to safeguard U.S. personnel and property. Although the embassy was ultimately overrun, the actions of the Marines demonstrated their commitment to protecting classified U.S. information and equipment in the face of overwhelming odds.

Long overshadowed by the hostage crisis in Iran that was then in its third week, the brief seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, most clearly demonstrated the professionalism and bravery of a MSG detachment.[11] Convinced that the United States was behind the attack on the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, a large Pakistani mob quickly overwhelmed the local guard force and stormed the U.S. Embassy compound. Demonstrators seized the weapons from the local policemen and begin firing on Marine guards on the roof, hitting and killing Corporal Steven Crowley. As some Marines held off the intruders with tear gas, others escorted over 100 embassy staff and visitors into a secure vault on the third floor. Marines outside the vault used tear gas to hold off the rioters for over two hours before they expended all of their gas and smoke grenades and withdrew into the vault. An hour after the final members of the MSG joined the other besieged Americans in the secure vault, they began to smell smoke in the ventilation ducts and realized the

embassy had been set on fire. As smoke seeped into the vault and the carpet began to singe from the heat of the fire below, the RSO (Andrew Koritko) directed the MSG detachment NCOIC (Master Sergeant Loyd E. Miller) to scout out a way through the fire, smoke, and tear gas to safety. After finding and securing a route, the Marines then escorted everyone out of the vault, up a ladder onto the roof, across the roof to the auditorium, and finally down to the ground where the Pakistani Army had just arrived. A *Time* magazine correspondent who was visiting the embassy at the time of the attack and sheltered in the vault later commented, "It was our Marine guards who saved us. Nobody else."[12] The after-action report concluded that the rescue came as the result of both divine intervention and "a few good Marines." The Secretary of the Navy awarded the MSG detachment a Meritorious Unit Citation for their defense of the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad and the safe evacuation of 137 Americans and local nationals.

The Marines in Beirut, Lebanon, faced a persistent period of civil war and sectarian violence from 1982 to 1984. On March 31, 1982, Marine Security Guards provided cover for several embassy staff members and rescued them after they were pinned down by hostile fire. The increased violence in Beirut prompted the U.S. Ambassador to order several new defensive posts within the embassy. For the next six weeks, MSGs stood an average of 70 hours per week on duty to maintained heightened protective measures. Multiple bomb threats reached the embassy, which was under almost daily mortar, small-arms, and rocket-propelled grenade crossfire from warring factions. On June 7, 1982, a fragment from an errant round wounded an MSG as he maintained his post during intense shelling. On April 18, 1983, a suicide bomber drove a van filled with 2,000 pounds of explosives up to the lobby of the embassy and detonated his bomb. The blast ripped apart the front portion of the seven-story structure, killing Lance Corporal Robert V. McMaugh instantly along with 52 embassy employees and Lebanese. The blast also severely wounded seven other MSGs on duty.

Additional Marines from the 22nd Marine Amphibious Unit assisted the MSGs with guarding the damaged embassy and recovering valuable and classified U.S. property. With the U.S. Embassy destroyed, the British Ambassador to Lebanon offered space in the British Embassy. A platoon of Marines protected diplomatic personnel, becoming the first time in history that U.S. Marines helped secure a British Embassy. Other Marines secured other temporary mission offices and residences. The Secretary of the Navy awarded the Beirut MSG a Navy Unit Citation for "their cool reaction to crisis, determination in the face of adversity, and selfless dedication to duty." Almost a year after the suicide bombing of the Marine Barracks in Beirut that killed over 243 Marines and other servicemembers, another suicide bomb targeted the U.S. Embassy in September 1984.[13] The blast killed two officers from the Defense Attaché's Office and wounded four Marine Security Guards. Despite the constant peril, duty with the MSG in Beirut became a highly sought-after assignment. Each of the 14 MSGs in Beirut in 1984 were volunteers who had specifically asked to be transferred there from less dangerous posts across the world.[14]

Marine Security Guards also faced increasing acts of violence directed toward the U.S. Embassy and Marines in Panama from 1987 to 1989. Anti-American demonstrations in front of the U.S. Embassy in March 1988 prompted the MSG detachment commander to request reinforcements from Marine Barracks Panama. An August 1989 exercise included a reinforcement of Marines to the embassy and the ambassador's residence. The erratic behavior of General Manuel Antonio Noriega, who refused to recognize the results of national elections and the anti-American violence inflicted by Panamanian "Dignity Battalions," prompted President George H.W. Bush to prepare to launch Operation Just Cause to restore order and democracy to Panama and to protect American lives and interests. As U.S. forces prepared for the operation, the Panamanian Defense



1983: Marines and other members of a multinational peacekeeping force assess the damage caused by a terrorist bomb attack on the U.S. Embassy in Beirut. (National Archives and Records Administration)

Forces launched rocket propelled grenades and small-arms fire at the U.S. Embassy. The Marines loaded their pistols and shotguns and attempted to disperse the attackers with gas grenades for nearly 24 hours before Army Rangers came to reinforce the embassy. Reflecting on the MSG's performance, General Maxwell R. Thurman, Commander of U.S. Southern Command, commented, "an infantry company of lesser men could not have done as well as the eight embassy Marines."[15]

Post-Cold War and the War on Terror: Adapting to New Threats

The end of the Cold War brought new threats. The continued rise of terrorism and asymmetric warfare required a reevaluation of diplomatic security protocols. During the decade of the 1990s, conditions at posts in Africa and Southwest Asia increasingly challenged MSGs as they responded to security threats associated with several coups d'état and facilitated Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations. Commencing with the defense of the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia, Liberia, in 1990, Marine Security Guards provided enhanced security at embassies across the continent of Africa throughout the 1990s, including during humanitarian interventions in Rwanda and Burundi (1994 and 1996), in Brazzaville, Congo (1997), and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1998), and finally, helped respond to the terrorist bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998.

In Brazzaville, for example, the ambassador directed the Marine detachment commander to organize a two-vehicle convoy to collect all known American citizens and bring them into the embassy compound prior to their evacuation as Congo descended into political violence. The Marines conducted several missions over the next several days, managing to rescue the majority of American citizens (including two U.S. Government officials trapped in the sectarian fighting) and other foreign citizens, including many French families. The Marines worked with their French counterparts to secure the airfield to complete the evacuation of U.S. citizens. The Marines then returned to the U.S. Embassy to begin the final evacuation procedures of shredding and burning the remaining classified material and conducting security sweeps of the building. After the ambassador issued the final order to close the embassy, the ambassador, the staff, the remaining evacuees, and the MSGs boarded airplanes and departed the country. Marines once again were the "last out."[16]



Only Marines are given the responsibility of guarding U.S. Embassies. (U.S. Marine Corps)

Osama Bin Laden's call for a jihad against Americans inspired the twin terrorist bombings in Kenya and Tanzania on August 7, 1998. Marine Security Guards were among the casualties.[17] During both crises, MSGs tirelessly guarded the crumbled compounds, searched the rubble for victims, classified material and vital equipment until Marine reinforcements arrived to relieve them. A Marine after-action report emphasized that "Each Marine continued to serve our country and our Department of State with distinction... we are talking initially about only six Marines...They have not missed a beat and will continue guarding Americans and America's interests abroad, as Marines have done for over 222 years." The chargé d'affaires in Tanzania, John Lange, concurred. He commended the Marines for how "exceptionally well they performed their duties under extreme conditions of chaos and terror. Their bravery and heroism was displayed in such a confident and purposeful manner that their very presence transferred to others, allowing them to get through the situation."[18]

The twin bombings in 1998 foreshadowed the devastating terrorist attacks on U.S. soil on September 11, 2001. Thereafter, the role of the MSGs at U.S. overseas posts became even more critical. The focused, fast and professional response of MSGs to a terrorist attack on the U.S. Consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in 2004 included stopping the attackers from entering the consulate building, protecting those in the compound, and moving personnel to a reinforced, safe area. Additional Marines deployed to protect U.S. embassies and consulates in regions affected by the War on Terror, including Iraq and Afghanistan. Their presence contributed to ensuring the safety of U.S. personnel and property at two of the largest diplomatic missions that operated in the middle of combat zones. Among the more than 450 Marines killed in the war in Afghanistan are 11 who lost their lives in 2021 covering America's final withdrawal of diplomatic personnel from Kabul.[19]

Modern-Day Collaboration: The MSG Program and Beyond

Today, the Marine Corps and the Department of State continue to work closely to ensure the safety of U.S. diplomatic missions worldwide. The MSG program remains a cornerstone of this collaboration, with Marines stationed at over 182 U.S. embassies and consulates in more than 150 countries. These Marines are responsible for protecting American personnel, classified information, and property, serving as the first line of defense against potential threats.[20]

In addition to the MSG program, the Marine Corps and the Department of State collaborate on training and crisis response. Many Marines receive specialized training in diplomatic security, ensuring they are prepared to handle a wide range of threats. The two institutions also work together to develop contingency plans for evacuations and other emergencies, ensuring the safety of U.S. personnel and citizens abroad.

ENDNOTES

[1] Leo J. Daughterty III, *The Marine Corps and the State Department: Enduring Partners in United States Foreign Policy, 1798-2007,* Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company (2009), 349.

[2] David McCullough, "Winter Crossing" *American Heritage* (July/August 2001). https://www.americanheritage.com/winter-crossing

[3] Roberts succeeded in Siam and Oman, failed in Cochin China. Toby Finnegan, *Edmund Roberts of New Hampshire: America's First Diplomat to Asia,* Newcastle on Tyne: Cambridge Scholars (2025). See also Andrew C.A. Jampoler, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts: America's Secret First Pivot Toward Asia, 1832-37,* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press (2015), and Toby Finnegan, "Encounter at Vung Lam: New Hampshire Businessman Edmund Roberts and America's First Diplomatic Negotiation with an Asian Country," *Historical New Hampshire* (Spring 2017): 3-35.

[4] Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations Throughout History.* (1997). Lithograph from William Heine in National Portrait Gallery.

[5] Allan Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (1991): 161.

[6] Conger to Hay, August 17, 1900 in *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS).* https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1900/d152. Daugherty, 40-49.

[7] https://www.mcesg.marines.mil/

[8] Daugherty, 97–102. See also *FRUS* on the evacuation of the embassy staff and U.S. citizens: https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v07/d87

[9] Daugherty, 138–148.

[10] The six killed include one in the ransacking of the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, four off-duty MSGs killed in San Salvador, and one killed in the embassy bombing in Beirut.

[11] The applicable *FRUS* volume contains several documents on this episode: *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980, Volume XIX, South Asia.* Documents 375–387.

[12] Daugherty, 246–52.

[13] A separate Hizballah terrorist attack on the Marine barracks in Lebanon unaffiliated with the diplomatic mission on October 23, 1983, killed 241 U.S. military personnel, including 220 Marines, 18 sailors, and three soldiers. It was the single deadliest day for the Marine Corps since the Battle of Iwo Jima.

[14] Daugherty, 252–60.

[15] Daugherty, 267–71.

[16] Daugherty, 297–300. A much larger and more complex evacuation effort occurred in Lebanon in 2006. A Marine-led task force evacuated nearly 15,000 U.S. citizens in one of the largest overseas evacuations of American citizens in nearly four decades.

[17] Sgt. Jesse Nathanael Aliganga was killed in the terrorist bombing of U.S. Embassy Nairobi. Sgt. Daniel Briehl was wounded in the attack and was evacuated to the U.S. military hospital in Landstuhl, Germany.

[18] Daugherty, 302–308.

[19] https://dcas.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/app/conflictCasualties/oef/deaths

[20] https://www.mcesg.marines.mil/



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