

A Little History¹

Thomas R. Cuba

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Many people forget that the United States did not become the UNITED STATES of AMERICA with the declaration of independence. That document declared independent independence for each of the thirteen colonial signers.

The Revolutionary war was fought by a coalition of State Armies under one command. This was erected as the Continental Army. In the same manner, the Continental Navy was authorized and then followed shortly by the establishment of the Continental marines. The Continental Navy was authorized on October 3rd, 1775 and the Continental Marines were erected on November 10th, 1775.

Both of these forces were disbanded after the conclusion of the war. The Marines were dissolved in 1783 while the Navy persisted until 1785. The states, which were still not yet the United States, wanted no part of a standing army, but kept one regiment as a precaution: The First American Regiment. The original coalition had been organized under the Articles of Confederation in 1781, but the formal unification into a single nation would wait for eight more years.

Once the Constitution was ratified in 1789, Congress established the Revenue Cutter Service to patrol the coast and operate in maritime law enforcement. The Service was renamed the Coast Guard in 1915.

Even with the Revenue Cutter Service in place, it didn't take long for Congress to realize that a Navy remained a necessity and Congress Authorized the formation of the United States Navy on March, 27th, 1794. It would be four more years before Congress also authorized the United States Marine Corps: July 11th, 1798.

TIMELINE:

Continental Navy established - Oct 3 1775

Continental Marine Corps established - Nov 10, 1775

Articles of Confederation signed - 1781

Treaty of Paris signed - Sep 3, 1783

Continental Marine Corps disbanded 1783

First American Regiment (Army) - June 3rd 1784

Continental Navy disbanded 1785

¹ Written to help resolve the argument over the order in which military service flags should be displayed.

Ratification of the United States Constitution 1789

Revenue Cutter Service (Coast Guard) established - August 4th, 1790²

United States Navy established - 27 March 1794

United States Marine Corps established - 11 July 1798

United States Air Force - Sept 18th, 1947

Both the Navy and Marines were used in the Revolutionary war and both were disbanded at the close of that war: These were the Continental Navy and the Continental Marines. In each, the Navy came first, but that becomes irrelevant unless arguing with a Marine. Subsequently both were reauthorized.

United States Navy: 27 March 1794

United States Marines: 11 July 1798

So, under both scenarios, the Navy predates the Marines. The flags are those of the United States Services not the Continental Services.

The Continental Army was never disbanded; it was transferred to the United States at ratification and remains the first military service.

² The Revenue Cutter Service at the time was a tax collection agency of the Treasury Department and its place in the order of the flags can be argued to be either first or last depending on what part of history you wish to ignore.