

= Corps of Colonial Marines =

The Corps of Colonial Marines were two Marine units raised from former slaves for service in the Americas by the British at the behest of Alexander Cochrane . The units were created at two different times , and were later disbanded once the military threat had disappeared .

The first Corps was a small unit that served in the Caribbean from 1808 to 12 October 1810 , recruited from former slaves to address the shortage of military manpower in the Caribbean . The locally @-@ recruited men were less susceptible to tropical illnesses than were troops sent from Britain . The Corps followed the practice of the British Army 's West India Regiments in recruiting slaves as soldiers .

The second , more substantial , Corps served from 18 May 1814 until 20 August 1816 . The greater part of the Corps was stationed on the Atlantic coast , with a smaller body occupying a fort on the Gulf coast in Florida . Recruits were accepted from among escaped slaves who had already gained their freedom on coming into British hands and who were unwilling to join West India Regiments . The establishment of the force sparked controversy at the time , the arming of former slaves representing a psychological threat to the slave @-@ owning society of the Americas ) . As a consequence , the two senior officers of the Corps in Florida ( George Woodbine and Edward Nicolls ) were demonised in Niles ' Register for their association with the Corps and inducing slave revolt .

At the end of the War of 1812 , as the British post in Florida was evacuated the Corps ' Florida detachment was paid off and disbanded . Although several men accompanied the British to Bermuda , the majority continued to live in settlements around the wooden stockade the Corps had garrisoned ( which had become a symbol of slave insurrection ) . This legacy of a community of armed fugitive slaves with a substantial arsenal would lead to tensions with the United States of America . Those remaining later took part in the Battle of Negro Fort in July 1816 , after which they joined the southward migration of Seminoles and African Americans escaping the American advance . Members of the Colonial Marine battalion who were deployed on the Atlantic coast withdrew from American territory . They would continue in British service as garrison @-@ in @-@ residence at Bermuda until 1816 , when the unit was disbanded and the ex @-@ Marines resettled on Trinidad .

= = First Corps = =

Rear Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane raised the first Corps of Colonial Marines in 1808 while commander @-@ in @-@ chief of British naval forces on the Leeward Islands station during the Napoleonic Wars . The British had captured the island of Marie Galante earlier that year , but the French governor of Guadeloupe attacked the island on hearing that illness had weakened its British garrison . Marie Galante slaves assisted the British when promised that they would not be returned to their proprietors ; by this means , the island was preserved under British control until the arrival of three companies of the 1st West India Regiment .

Cochrane named the ex @-@ slaves the Corps of Colonial Marines , which was enlarged with fugitive slaves from Guadeloupe . The Corps was paid from Marie Galante revenues , clothed from Royal Navy stores and commanded by Royal Marine officers . After the repossession of Guadeloupe Cochrane maintained the Corps , and on 12 October 1810 redistributed the men : 70 among the ships of the squadron , 20 to 30 to the battery at the Saintes ( a group of small islands south of Guadeloupe ) and 50 remaining in the Marie Galante garrison . They saw no further action as a distinct body , but were listed in ships ' musters among supernumeraries for wages and victuals under the description " Colonial Marine " until mid @-@ 1815 .

= = Second Corps = =

Cochrane , by now a Vice Admiral , assumed his position as Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of British forces on the North Atlantic station in April 1814 and ordered the recruitment of a body of

Colonial Marines as he had done six years earlier on Marie Galante . Rear Admiral George Cockburn , Cochrane 's second @-@ in @-@ command on the Atlantic coast , implemented Cochrane 's order recruiting the second Corps of Colonial Marines . It served as part of the British forces on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States during the War of 1812 .

On 2 April 1814 , Cochrane issued a proclamation to all persons wishing to emigrate . Any persons would be received by the British , either at a military outpost or aboard British ships ; those seeking sanctuary could enter His Majesty 's forces , or go " as free settlers to the British possessions in North America or the West Indies " . ( An historical precedent was Dunmore 's Proclamation of 7 November 1775 , although this offered freedom only to those who bore arms with British forces . )

= = = Recruitment and Atlantic coast service = = =

By 10 May , Tangier Island off the Virginia coast had been occupied by the British and offered an accessible location for those seeking refuge . Male refugees were given the option " to become blue Jackets , take up arms or [ to ] join the working party " constructing Fort Albion and its infrastructure . The Corps was embodied on 18 May 1814 and made its combat debut in the raid on Pungoteague Creek on 30 May 1814 where , in a skirmish known as the Battle of Rumley 's Gut , it helped capture an American artillery battery . James Ross , captain of HMS Albion , later described their involvement as " a most excellent specimen of what they are likely to be . Their conduct was marked by great spirit and vivacity , and perfect obedience " . One , a soldier named Michael Harding , was killed early in the battle but " it did not daunt or check the others , but on the contrary animated them to seek revenge " . Cockburn 's initial impressions were positive ; he observed that the new recruits were " getting on astonishingly " and were " really fine fellows " . After this , the Corps participated in the Chesapeake campaign ; in subsequent correspondence , Cockburn wrote that the recruits had behaved " unexpectedly well " in several engagements and had not committed any " improper outrages " .

Members of the Corps served alongside their shipborne Royal Marine counterparts from the Cockburn Chesapeake squadron ( HM Ships Albion , Dragon , Loire , Jasseur and the schooner HMS St Lawrence ) , participating in a series of raids . After the British failed to destroy the American Chesapeake Bay Flotilla at the Battle of St. Jerome Creek , they conducted coastal raids on the towns of Calverton , Huntingtown , Prince Frederick , Benedict and Lower Marlborough . On 15 June 1814 , a force of 30 Colonial Marines accompanied 180 Royal Marines in 12 boats in a raid on Benedict . Nine days later , on 24 June , a force of 50 Colonial and 180 Royal Marines attacked an artillery battery at Chesconessex Creek ( although this failed to prevent the escape of the Chesapeake Bay Flotilla , which left St. Leonard 's Creek two days later ) .

The arrival on 19 July of a battalion of Royal Marines , which had left Bermuda on 30 June , enabled the squadron to mount further expeditions ashore . After a series of diversionary raids , the Marines were again landed at Benedict on 19 August accompanied by recently @-@ arrived Peninsular War army veterans . The battalion was to accompany the Colonial Marines in attacks on Bladensburg and Washington in August 1814 . A company fought at the Battle of Bladensburg , and the other two companies took part in the burning of Washington . One of the firing parties was led by Second Lieutenant Lewis Agassiz ( 1793 ? 1866 ) ; for his part in the battle , his family was later granted a coat of arms depicting a torch . Casualties suffered by the Colonial Marines during this action were one man killed and three wounded .

On 3 September 1814 , three companies of the Colonial Marines joined with three remaining companies of Royal Marines to form the 3rd Battalion , Royal and Colonial Marines . Later that month , all three companies fought at the Battle of North Point in Maryland . A fourth company was created in December 1814 , and further recruitment was begun along the Georgia coast during the first quarter of 1815 . The number of enlistments allowed two more companies to be raised , with sergeants taken from companies recruited in the Chesapeake .

Although the Corps suffered some combat losses during its Chesapeake campaign actions in 1814 , its greatest losses arose from disease due to poor conditions on Tangier Island . An outbreak of dysentery in the winter of 1814 killed the surgeon and 69 men from the battalion . The Corps ' last

tour during the War of 1812 was in Georgia from December to March 1815 . Admiral George Cockburn seized the southern U.S coast to disrupt trade , communication , and transportation of troops to the Gulf of Mexico , where Admiral Cochrane 's forces planned to take the southwestern territories of the U.S. Part of the Corps joined the successful British attack on Fort Point Peter . The corps occupied Camden County and Cumberland Island , aiding the emigration of an estimated 1 @, @ 485 slaves from southeast Georgia .

= = = Recruitment and Gulf coast service = = =

In addition to British outposts on the Atlantic coast at Tangier and the Cumberland Islands , there was a similar outpost on the Gulf coast at Prospect Bluff on the Apalachicola River in Spanish East Florida which attracted Redstick Creek Indians and Black Seminoles . George Woodbine and a detachment of Royal Marines were landed from HMS Orpheus in May 1814 with gifts , two thousand muskets and blankets for the Indians . A fort was constructed , and Cochrane sent Edward Nicolls to oversee the operations at Prospect Bluff .

Nicolls left Bermuda with 112 Royal Marines , 3 field pieces , 300 uniforms and 1 @, @ 000 muskets for recruits to his corps . On 26 August 1814 Nicolls issued his first " order of the day " for his " battalion " . It remains uncertain how many men Nicolls had under his command at that time , since muster and pay records have not been found . More escaped slaves were recruited in Pensacola ( to the chagrin of the Spanish ) , but they were forced to return to Prospect Bluff in November after the American capture of Pensacola .

= = Post @-@ war developments = =

The war ended in February 1815 , and the three European companies of the 3rd Battalion , Royal and Colonial Marines were sent back to Britain . With their departure , the battalion was reformed as the 3rd Battalion , Colonial Marines , consisting of six infantry companies of Colonial Marines and a staff company of Royal Marines brought from Canada . It performed garrison duty at the Royal Naval Dockyard at Ireland Island , Bermuda and was disbanded in Trinidad on 20 August 1816 . Near what is now known as Princes Town , the former Colonial Marines formed a free farming community , known as the Merikens ( sometimes spelled Merikins ) under the supervision of their former non @-@ commissioned officers , the men formed 16 @-@ acre ( 6 @. @ 5 ha ) households . These settlements were successful , and in 1847 their ownership of the land was formally recognised . The community of descendants retains its identity and commemorates its roots in an annual celebration .

The detachment in Florida , which had grown to about 400 men , was paid off and disbanded when the British post was evacuated at the end of the war . A small number of men went to Bermuda with the British as part of a refugee group , rejoining the main body of Colonial Marines . Others from the Florida unit remained in settlements around the wooden stockade , which had become a symbol of slave insurrection . Andrew Jackson opposed the presence of a group of armed fugitive slaves ( although they were in a sparsely @-@ populated area of Spanish Florida ) ; this led to the Battle of Negro Fort in July 1816 and the beginning of the First Seminole War . For their involvement in the conflict , two former auxiliary officers of the corps were executed in 1818 in what became known as the Arbuthnot and Ambrister incident . It is believed that former Colonial Marine refugees were among a group that escaped to the Bahamas in 1822 and founded , on the west coast of the island of Andros , a community that retains its identity to the present day .