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Brigadier General Edwin Howard Simmons, USMC (Ret.), **The United States Marines: A History, 4th Edition** (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2003), Pp. 405, \$37.50 (Hardcover), \$19.95 (Paperback).

Reviewed by Hal M. Friedman, Senior Modern History Instructor, Henry Ford Community College

General Simmons' 4th edition of *The United States Marines: A History* will remain a useful survey history for general readers and a handy reference tool for specialists. However, the book is heavily dated in terms of historiographical interpretations and this lessens its value to both intended audiences.

The author employs a very traditional and sensible chronological organization, starting with the first organized Marine Corps operations in the Revolutionary War and proceeding to the latest deployments of Marine expeditionary units in 2000. While general readers will probably appreciate the chronological versus thematic organization; both general readers and specialists will probably notice a gap in that the author did not include an introduction to this edition. While the conclusion of the book is not wanting, an introduction in which readers can be keyed into the major topics and themes would have been extremely helpful.

Moreover, the volume seems "choppy" in many respects. To some extent, this "choppiness" cannot be helped in a survey volume that covers 225 years of Marine Corps history. Still, covering less material more thoroughly or expanding the size of the volume might have been options. In addition, this reviewer would have appreciated greater coverage of the pre-1898 Marine Corps, though in fairness to the author this over

concentration on post-1898 affairs is a weakness to be found in most military history surveys, including Allan Millet's *Semper Fidelis*.^[1]

One strength of the book is Simmons' rendition of the expansion of the Corps, especially by astute Commandants such as Archibald Henderson. Similarly, we get a good picture, in spite of the brevity of each chapter, of the inner power structure of the Corps as an organization, how each Commandant advanced Corps interests, and how and why the Commandants were chosen in light of their early careers and actions. This reviewer had a particularly good portrait of the Corps' "movers and shakers" by the end of the book.

Another weakness, however, is the book's dated historiographical interpretations. For instance, recounting US entrance into the War of 1812, the author, while mentioning impressment issues did not talk about conflicts with Indians in the Old Northwest or President Madison's ideas of conquering Canada so as to hold it hostage and force Great Britain to stop the impressments. Similarly, the author seems reluctant to discuss US weaknesses or mistakes, whether these are disastrous US campaigns such as the invasion of Canada from Detroit in 1812 or more recent debacles such as the strategic mistakes made in Vietnam.

There is also a reluctance to explore US actions in other than positive lights. Recent documentary evidence, for instance, demonstrates that US naval forces intruded into Korean waters in 1871, thus provoking an armed Korean response. The idea that the Koreans fired on US forces for no reason other than being the Hermit Kingdom should have undergone revision for this edition. While the readers definitely gets the idea that the Marines were the US' colonial police force, especially from the 1870s to the 1930s in Latin America, the idea that these actions were some sort of US imperialism is not explored, but could have been in light of recent historiography. In a related way, biases were demonstrated that really should be revised in such a late edition. It is perfectly reasonable to point out and even condemn the treason of Sergeant Clayton Lonetree. Yet, the book should also have discussed the disgraceful conduct of Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North in the Iran-Contra Affair. While the latter's actions might not be considered treasonable (though this reviewer sees them as such), Colonel North's violation of his

Officer's Oath should be covered, lest the readers get the impression that United States Marines do not do such things or that the Corps' biographers ignore such events when they happen.

In short, this edition is a fine reference for specialists and a good survey for general readers. A 5th edition, however, should entail significant historiographical rewriting and some additional balance to the more controversial aspects of the Marines' illustrious history. A history of the Marine Corps should demonstrate both the organization's strong points as well as its warts. It is, after all, an organization founded to defend a nation which alleges to gain strength by airing its dirty laundry and dealing openly with its problems. If the United States Marine Corps really does defend a nation like that and if it reflects that nation, then its history should reflect those positive and negative realities as well.

^[1] Allan Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: The Free Press, 2003).



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