Leatherneck: A Borrowed Nickname

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MANY VISITORS to the Smithsonian Institution have found the Navy History Room to be delightfully interesting. Many of those same visitors have come away from that room, after viewing the Marine Corps Exhibit, with the firm conviction that they had learned how the popular nickname of "Leatherneck" had come into being. They have believed that this bit of information could be passed on to others without being challenged effectively. To provide the "clincher" in any discussion of the term, and to silence any scoffers, those same individuals would triumphantly assert, "And, furthermore, I saw it at the Smithsonian!"

Ever since August 10, 1954, when the U. S. Marine Corps "opened its permanent exhibit at the National Museum,"[1] a display card has been prominently placed before an old leather stock which has constituted the focal point of interest in one of the exhibit cases. The card, with seeming authoritativeness, states:

LEATHERNECK

CA. 1775–1833

A LEATHER STOCK, FROM WHICH MARINES GAINED THEIR NOW FAMOUS NICKNAME WAS WORN AROUND THE NECK BY MARINES UP UNTIL 1875. FASTENED AT THE BACK OF THE NECK, THE STOCK WAS DESIGNED PRIMARILY TO ASSURE A MILITARY APPEARANCE SINCE THE WEARER WAS REQUIRED TO CARRY HIS CHIN HIGH.

IN THE EARLY DAYS OF OUR NAVY, JACK TAR WAS AN EASY-GOING MORTAL NOT PARTICULARLY SUSCEPTIBLE TO SELF-DISCIPLINE. IT WAS THE

[1] *Military Collector & Historian*, VI (Fall, 1954), 82.

MARINE GUARD THAT GAVE A MAN-OF-WAR ITS MILITARY CHARACTER AND TO THE SEAMEN THE LEATHER STOCK SEEMED TO TYPIFY THE ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF THE MARINE, HENCE THE SOBRIQUET: "LEATHERNECK."[2]

The card definitely adds to the interest of the "exhibit." It may be said that it definitely stimulates the imagination and that it provides the highlight of the display. However, the statements in the card play loose with historical facts. As the card now reads, it contains entirely too much fiction, i.e., it is pure conjecture – plausible, it is true, but nevertheless it is still conjecture.

A more historically correct display card, or label, would state, in substance, the following:

LEATHER STOCK

CA. 1798–1833

A LEATHER STOCK, IDENTICAL WITH OR SIMILAR TO THAT OF THE U. S. ARMY, WAS WORN AROUND THE NECK BY MARINES FROM 1798 UP UNTIL 1875. FASTENED AT THE BACK OF THE NECK, THE STOCK WAS DESIGNED PRIMARILY TO ASSURE A MILITARY APPEARANCE SINCE THE WEARER WAS REQUIRED TO CARRY HIS CHIN HIGH.

[2] In a letter to the author, dated March 24, 1959, the Smithsonian Institution disclaimed all responsibility for the preparation of the display card: "The information you read on the label concerning the term *Leatherneck* was furnished to us by the Marine Corps as was all the information incorporated in the Marine Corps exhibit. We suggest that you write to the Director of the U. S. Marine Corps Museum for further clarification." In a subsequent telephone conversation with the Director (Lieutenant Colonel John H. Magruder, III, USMCR) at 2:15 P.M., March 26, 1959, he remarked: "I hear that you are trying to pin me down." He stated that, in the preparation of the display card, he had assumed that the sailors had bestowed the nickname on the Marines; that his assumption was based on "reading between the lines of the communications and testimony taken during Congressional hearings of the periodical attempts to abolish the Marine Corps"; and that he had no citation, no verifiable date, and no illustration of an early usage. He added that he felt that he would be able to justify his assumption – in spite of the absence of any positive documentation – but, up to the time of this writing, he has not yet done so.

UNIVERSALLY DISLIKED AND THOROUGHLY DETESTED BY THE WEARER AS AN UNCOMFORTABLE ARTICLE OF THE UNIFORM, IT HAS BEEN ENSHRINED IN TRADITION BY INGENIOUS FICTION, FOR WHICH THERE IS NO FOUNDATION IN FACT, ALLEGING IT TO BE THE ORIGIN OF THE NOW FAMOUS NICKNAME: "LEATHERNECK."

It will probably come as a distinct shock to many enthusiastic, zealous U. S. Marines to learn that their favorite and cherished nickname is not original with them and that they did not "come by it honestly."[3] They may be perturbed to learn that the term did not have its origin in an American leather stock, i.e., neither the Army nor the Marine article of issue; and that the leather stock was never designed for any purpose other than to achieve a military "head-held-high" appearance on the part of the wearer. The term was not created by nor originally used by members of the U. S. Navy. A prolonged investigation is not necessary to unearth the facts that the term is relatively new in American speech and that it was acquired rather recently by the simple expedient of borrowing it from abroad.

The fact that the term is a borrowed one does not detract in the least from the connotations associated with the present-day usage, but it does indicate that the attempted explanations of the origin of the term are nothing more than "window-dressing" or "eye-wash." Those dyed-in-the-wool U. S. Marines of today, who are thoroughly imbued with the very splendid and much envied Marine *esprit de*

[3] To a limited extent, nicknames can be thought of as being similar to trade marks. The latter, of course, have the protection of law after they have been registered. Even though it is neither legally wrong nor morally wrong as a point in ethics to appropriate a nickname to one's own use without the consent of the original user, the emotional objection is such as to justify the remark that "they did not 'come by it honestly.'" However, it should also be mentioned that trade marks, or even words, may lose their association with specific goods, as, for example, has happened in the case of the trade mark "Aspirin." The change from "Aspirin" to "aspirin" aptly illustrates that words have the meaning which the people, who use them, give to them; and that they may not mean what they may have originally meant. The general thought – and it applies equally well to "Leatherneck" – was succinctly summed up by Judge Learned Hand in Coty, Inc., v. Le Blume Import Company, Inc., 292 *Federal Reporter* 266 (1923): "A word means what people understand it to say and there is an end of it."

corps, can very correctly and very justly point with pride to the fact that they and their immediate predecessors have contributed much to the glorification of the title of "Leatherneck" since World War I. However, the American glorification of the term came as something separate and apart from the original usage.

Although the term had been adopted by and applied to the U. S. Marine shortly prior to World War I, the popularity of its use had been essentially a post World War I development. The term received tacit official approval of the Marine Corps, and its use has been generally encouraged and carefully nurtured to project the image of "the fighting Marine."[4] However, the fact still remains that the nickname had been borrowed, and that it had been perpetuated in American usage after it had been shelved by the original users.

Originally, "Leatherneck" was a British term used to designate the British soldier, and later extended to include the Royal Marine. The term was never widely used in British speech – only to the extent that was sufficient to enable the hearers to recognize it as a term identifying either the soldier or the marine. It has fallen into a very limited usage – almost a disuse – and has been almost entirely superseded by "Bootneck" at the present time.

On the rare occasions when the term is used to designate a Royal Marine, many of today's "Bootnecks" resent what they consider to be a misapplication of the nickname. They are completely unaware that the usage is historically correct. A few years ago, a Royal Marine corporal made the following vigorous protest:

> Whilst reading an English paper recently I noticed an article on the buying of premises in Eaton Place, London, for the purpose of a Royal Marines Club, but what really caught my eye was the fact that we, the Royal Marines, were referred to as "Leathernecks." This is not the first time

[4] The Marines, themselves, helped in the creation of that image. More accurately identified with the World War I period, but accasionally heard today, one of the most boastful songs of the Marines is:

> "The Leathernecks, the Leathernecks, with dirt behind their ears!
> The Leatherneck's the man that mops up all the beers;
> The Infantry, the Cavalry, and the dirty Engineers
> Couldn't lick the Leathernecks in a hundred thousand years."

that we have been quoted as such and I don't think it will be the last unless this is rectified.

You may wonder at this fuss. Quoting the Royal Marines as "Leathernecks" is a grave mistake, as the expression is strictly an American Marine nick-name, whereas a Royal Marine, as any lower deck marine or sailor will tell you, is "Bootneck."[5]

Corporal Mitcheson, on his own, conducted a small survey. He concluded that it was "a pretty grim state of affairs," that most of those queried knew that a "Leatherneck" was an American Marine, but that he "received blank looks" in reply to his query as to "what a 'Bootneck' was." He added:

> This brings me to the all-important fact. If a large percentage of British people know that a "leatherneck" is an American Marine, and we, the "Bootnecks" keep getting misquoted as "Leathernecks" it is going to confuse a lot of people let alone give some other Corps a lot of unearned publicity at some time or other.
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> It may now be a good opportunity to point out how the nick-name "Bootneck" came to be used universally throughout the British Navy. It is said that in Lord Nelson's days, Royal Marines' tunic collars were lined with leather material. When a Marine wished to reline his collar it wasn't past some of them to cut the tongues out of some poor "Dabtoe's" [sailor's] boots and use that. Hence, the sailor's quip when wanting to draw the attention of a Marine, "Hey, Bootneck."[6]

A former Royal Marine officer "joined issue," and commented:

> If this is so today [that the expression is strictly an American Marine nickname], it has not always been the case. When I was serving, as a Lieutenant, R. M. L. I., on board the *Hannibal* 1902–03, the Marines were always referred to as "Leathernecks." I am convinced that this nickname was in common use among the blue-jackets at the time.

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[5] J. E. Mitcheson, "What's in a Name?" *The Globe & Laurel*, XLII (October, 1954), 222/1.

[6] Mitcheson, p. 222/1.

> My theory, I give it for what it is worth, is that the name "Leatherneck" was first applied to the U. S. Marines by those sailors of the Royal Navy who were enticed into joining the U. S. Navy. There were many such instances during the "Naughty Nineties" and the first decade of this century.[7]

An even older veteran of the Royal Marines added:

> As I hold views that in no way coincide with those of either gentlemen [Rev. J. A. F. Ozanne and Corporal J. E. Mitcheson], I take this opportunity of putting them forward, and in doing so state, without fear of contradiction, that the U. S. Marines have no more right to it [Leatherneck] than they had to the Highland sporan: it is as British as London smog and was in common use on the Lower Deck long before my time – 1888. Not only was it then in everyday use, but when embellished with a few words on parentage, it became the nude-toed Wiggies' term of endearment for the shod Marine.
>
> "Leatherneck," far from being in any way connected with America, is home-brewed. It was born on the neck of a Royal Marine and took its name from the small piece of leather sewn on the inner collar of his tunic to prevent irritation to the throat. "Leatherneck" is the property of the Royal Marines, and has been so since its first appearance.[8]

Grainger added several verses of a poem, but he did not identify either the author or the date. The context strongly suggests that it was written shortly after the Boxer Rebellion, i.e., before the first printed appearance of an American usage of the term for the American Marine:

THE LEATHERNECKS

Who landed on Gib's rock shore
Way back in seventeen nought four ?
Who opened wide the Don's front door ?
The Leathernecks.

[7] The Rev. J. A. F. Ozanne, F. Ph. S., "Letter," *The Globe & Laurel*, XLII (December, 1954), 254/1.

[8] William Grainger, "Letter," *The Globe & Laurel*, XLIV (February, 1956), 4/2.

Who formed four fours in Polar snows,
In fluffy caps and loose-cut clothes?
Who suffered ill from chillblained toes?
The Leathernecks.

Who trudged it over burning sands
With muskets clasped in sweating hands?
Who cursed aloud in torrid lands?
The Leathernecks.

Who went up north of old Hong Kong,
To mix it with the Boxers throng?
To shoot "Ah Hees" or miss "Lee Pong?"
The Leathernecks.

Whose ways were always mild and meek?
Who always turned the other cheek
To mountain Turk or coastal Greek?
The Leathernecks.

Who called the clinker knockers dear?
Who gave the Wiggies precious beer?
Who brought a Provo Christmas cheer?
The Leathernecks.[9]

Even if the term had never enjoyed a widespread usage in British speech, it was common enough during Grainger's time to have been noted by a dictionary of that period. One of the early British definitions, probably the earliest, was:

> Leather-necks (naval), a term for soldiers; from their leather stock, which to a sailor, with his neck free of any hindrance, must appear such an uncomfortable appliance.[10]

During the same year, in which the British dictionary definition appeared, the term made at least one printed appearance in a periodical:

> He [the sailor] despises his friend the leather-neck for a lazy and luxurious dog.[11]

[9] Grainger, p. 4/2.

[10] Albert Barrere and Charles G. Leland, *A Dictionary of Slang, Jargon & Cant* (London, 1890), II, 11/2.

[11] *Pall Mall Gazette* (January 24, 1890), 2/1, in *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (Oxford, 1908), VI, L–M, 162/2.

It is not clear in this illustration whether the term refers to the British soldier or to the Royal Marine. It is probable that the context suggested the British soldier as the dictionary entry stated:

> leather-neck, a sailor's name for a soldier, from the leather stock he used to wear.[12]

So far, in the early handling of the term, the Royal Marine has not been identified with the term. On that basis, Corporal Mitcheson could still point out that there has been no clear-cut evidence presented that has associated the Royal Marine with the term. However, he can hardly deny the clarity of its usage when it made its appearance in 1899 in a service publication:

> While washing down the upper deck he [the sailor] is to be seen in his element. To get hold of a hose and to squirt salt water everywhere, or to distribute it prodigally in tubfuls, is his delight. No duck is happier in his pond; in fact, his detractors among the Marines – "leather necks" he calls them – say that, if closely examined, he will be found, like other aquatic birds, to be web-footed.[13]

Equally clear is its usage in a short story involving the Royal Marines:

> "When we had a ship's theatricals off Vigo, Glass'ere played Dick Deadeye to the moral, though of course the lower deck wasn't pleased to see a leather-neck interpretin' a strictly maritime part, as you might say. It's only his repartees, which 'e can't contain, that conquers him . . ."[14]
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> . . . . . .
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> "'I'm only a pore beggar of a Red Marine with eighteen years' service, an' why for,' says he, wringin' 'is hands like this all the time, 'must I chuck away my pension, sub-lootenant or no sub-lootenant? Look at 'em,' he says, 'only look at 'em. Marines fallin' in for small-arm drill!"

[12] *NED*, VI, p. 162/1.

[13] John Stockholm, "A Day on the Lower Deck," *The Navy & Army Illustrated*, IX, (December 9, 1899), 306.

[14] Rudyard Kipling, "The Bonds of Discipline," (1903), in "Traffics and Discoveries," *The Writings in Prose and Verse of Rudyard Kipling* (New York, 1904), XXII, 56.

> "The leathernecks was layin' aft at the double, an' a more insanitary set of accidents I never wish to behold. Most of 'em was in their shirts. They had their trousers on, of course – rolled up nearly to the knee, but what I means is belts over shirts . . ."[15]
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> . . . . . .
>
> "The Marines carried the corpse below. Then the bugle give us some more 'Dead March.' Then we 'eard a splash from a bow six-pounder port, an' the bugle struck up a cheerful tune. The whole lower deck was complimentin' Glass, 'oo took it very meek. 'E *is* a good actor, for all 'e's a leatherneck."[16]

At a little earlier date, a Royal Marine, who was then a Captain, made use of the adjectival form of the term in conjunction with a nickname for a soldier to illustrate a sailor's way of derogatorily referring to a Royal Marine:

> "'What's the good of 'aving leather-necked grabbies aboord ship?' said an ordinary seaman once to a private of the Royal Marines. 'To keep you flat-footed, ginger-whiskered swamp rats from eating one another!' was the prompt and unexpected reply. Ridiculous as the taunt was in these latter days, it nevertheless rudely set forth the sea soldier's origin: for, such a rabble were the men-o'-war's men of the seventeenth and greater part of the eighteenth centuries, that the permanent presence on board of disciplined soldiers was necessary for the protection of naval officers . . ."[17]

In 1916, a writer of Royal Navy stories indicated that the Royal Marines were excluded, but that the British soldiers were included in the scope of application of the term:

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[15] Kipling, XXII, p. 60.

[16] Kipling, XXII, p. 78.

[17] Capt. [William Price] Drury, "The Sea Regiment," *The Navy & Army Illustrated*, II (October 30, 1896), p. 239. Drury is the very respected writer who perpetrated the hoax that King Charles was the first to remark in 1664, "If we doubt a tale, we shall first tell it to the Marines." Drury in 1930 admitted that it was a "leg-pull of his youth," but felt that his explanation of the "obnoxious phrase" was as good as others. [See: "Tell That (It) to the Marines," *American Speech*, XXXVI (December, 1961), pp. 248–50.]

> A drummer goes by the name of "sticks," from the implements with which he beats his drum, while seamen never refer to themselves as "sailors," but as "flatfeet" or "matloes," the latter word being again derived from the French. A Royal marine is a "bullock," "turkey," or "Joey," while a soldier is a "grabby" or "leather-neck."[18]

The next British dictionary handling of the term, which gave "top-billing" to the Royal Marine, came in 1925 in:

> leather neck: A bluejacket's term for a Marine: also for a soldier. From the leather stock worn at the neck of the coat or tunic in former times.[19]

The next appearance in British lexicography was in a 1929 compilation "of the old-timers' expressions and epithets" which sought to record the old slang of the Victorian Navy before "the older generation would have passed away entirely, and with them their characteristic expressions":

> Leatherneck. A Royal Marine.[20]

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[18] 'Taffrail' (pseud.), [Henry Taprell Dorling], "The Language of the Navy," in *Carry On! Naval Sketches and Stories* (London, 1916), p. 27.

[19] Edward Fraser and John Gibbons, *Soldier and Sailor Words and Phrases* (London, 1925), p. 142.

[20] Frank C. Bowen, *Sea Slang* (London, 1929), p. 82. See: (a) Walter Napier Thomas Beckett, *A Few Naval Customs, Expressions, Traditions and Superstitions*, 2d ed. (Portsmouth, 1931), p. 58: "A sailor, when speaking of any Royal Marine, often referred to him as a *Leatherneck*, and some times used the same term for soldiers as a whole. The reason being due to the leather tongue which closed the opening of the collar in the military pattern tunic." (b) Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (London, 1937), p. 475/1: "leather-neck. A soldier; more gen., a Royal Marine: nautical and esp. naval: mid-C. 19–20; ob. Bowen." (c) Robert Burgess and Roland Blackburn, *We Joined the Navy* (London, 1943), p. 119: "Leathernecks. Royal Marines." (d) John Irving, *Royal Navalese* (London, 1946), p. 107: "Leatherneck. A Royal Marine. The nickname is a reminder of the leather tongue-fastening which formerly held a Marine's tunic together at the throat." (e) Wilfred Granville, Frank Roberts and Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Forces' Slang 1939–1945* (London, 1948), p. 109: "Leathernecks. Royal Marines. The sobriquet dates from the time when the 'Royal's' uniform collar had a leather flap on the inside. A variant of the term 'bootneck.'" (f) Wilfred Granville, *Sea Slang of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1950), p. 143: "Leather-necks. Royal Marines. (See BOOTNECKS.) They're tough." (g) William Freeman, *A Concise Dictionary of English Slang* (London, 1956), p. 135: "LEATHER-NECK. A marine. (Orig. a soldier.)"

It was not until 1933 that a British lexicographer got around to acknowledging the application of "leatherneck" to the American Marine:

> Vocabularies: American
>
> .....
>
> Leatherneck. A marine (–G.W.+). 328.[21]

in which "G.W." is given as "the War of 1914–1918,"[22] and "328" as: "Mencken cited ... *gob* (a man in the navy), *leatherneck* (a marine), ... as being likely to endure in the language."[23]

The first appearance of the word "leatherneck" in any American dictionary was in 1891, but the definition made no reference to either soldier or marine, British or American:

> Leath'er-neck (leth'er-nek), n. (*Zoöl.*) The sordid friar bird of Australia (*Tropidorhynchus sordidus*).[24]

In 1909, two American dictionaries identified "leatherneck" with service personnel; one acknowledged that it was English naval slang, and identified it with "marine":

> leatherneck, n. A marine. [Engl. naval slang.][25]

but the other was noncommittal, inserted it as a footnote entry, and defined it as "soldier":

> leath'er-neck, n. A soldier. *Sailor's slang.*[26]

The first printed application of the term, i.e., the earliest so far identified, to the American Marine came in the same year. In this case, it was unmistakably clear that the writer used it to denote the

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[21] Eric Partridge, *Slang To-day and Yesterday* (London, 1933), p. 447.

[22] Partridge, *op.cit.*, p. 349.

[23] Partridge, *op.cit.*, p. 328. In a later edition, Partridge was misled into altering "(–G.W.+)" to "(–1839)" and added a footnote: "'The old U. S. Marine uniform had a large triangle of leather just below the collar inside the coat. Hence name. And this uniform was outlawed in 1839 or so,' Jean Bordeaux, in a private letter to the author, September, 1934." See: 3d ed. (London, 1950), p. 328, fn. 1.

[24] *Webster's International Dictionary of the English Language* (Springfield, 1891), p. 839/2.

[25] *The Century Dictionary Supplement* (New York, 1909), p. 715/2.

[26] *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language* (Springfield, 1909), p. 1228/6, [Footnote entry].

American Marine. It was used by an "ex-Marine" in his written protest in verse to the President's order "withdrawing all Marines from vessels of war," in which he also indicated a fear that the withdrawal order was the first step being taken towards the abolishing of the Marine Corps. However, the term must not have been either well known or understood in American usage at that time as the author thought it was necessary to add a footnote explaining its English origin and its application to the American Marines:

> We're at peace just now with all the world,
> But the time may come again
> When they'll want the brawn of the "leathernecks,"*
> And their want may be in vain.
> For they can't use land soldiers on the seas,
> It's the trained marines they need;
> Where will they find the sea soldiers then?
> The fighter with the faithful creed –
> Semper Fidelis.

* The original English Marines wore a very stiff leather collar to keep their heads erect, hence the term leathernecks.[27]

Even though it is probable that the American sailor used the term to designate the American Marine before the latter used it as a self-applied term, it was not until 1910 that it was identified in Navy speech:

> A recruit from inland had been aboard the receiving ship two days. Uniforms were rather confusing to him so he saluted every one not in bluejacket's clothes. He touched his cap to the marine sentry about twenty times one morning much to the amusement of a bunch of onlookers. Finally some one told him marines need not be saluted and let him know that the whole ship's company were laughing at him because he had been so respectful to the marine sentry.
>
> The next morning a dapper marine lieutenant was taking his stroll on the upper deck. He passed the recruit who stared open faced at him and laughed.

[27] E. L. Banny (Late of U.S.M.C.), "Semper Fidelis," *The Man-O'Warsman*, I (June, 1909), 487.

"Don't you know enough to salute an officer?" the lieutenant queried.

"Aw nix, now, nix," was the startling reply. "I'm wise to you leathernecks. Keep rolling."[28]

By 1911, the appearance in print indicated that the term was presumed to be understood by the general public as well as by members of the Navy:

A frolic? A fight? Oh, just send the Marines;
Give 'em their guns and a handful of beans.
Back out the transport and turn her around –
See the Leathernecks grin to be outward bound –
Our Army's a tough 'un, but here is the hunch –
It's the doggone Marines that land the first punch![29]

The Marine Corps initiated the development of a publicity program, prior to World War I, as a part of an improved recruiting program. The program, undoubtedly, was utilized to combat the adverse effects of a then popular witticism that had been flourishing for many years at the expense of the Marines, i.e., "a cynical reading of the initials of the official designation of that organization –

[28] "Service Wit and Rhyme," *Our Navy*, III (January, 1910), 18.

[29] Wex Jones, "The Leathernecks," *The Boston American*, (n.d.), in *The Fleet Review*, II (August, 1911), 50. See: (a) Thomas L. Sutton, "Letter, Camp Meyer, Deer Point, Guantanamo Bay, June 3, 1911," *The Fleet Review*, II (August, 1911), 33: "Would you give a leather neck enough room to print a few lines in the Review?" (b) Henry Walker Noyes, "Jungle Tragedy," *Our Navy*, V (October, 1911), 35: "A 'Leatherneck' paced on his lonely beat/..." (c) [Andrew Lewis Pendleton], *The Seagoing Experiences of one Heck Haskins Ordinary Seaman U. S. Navy* (Baltimore, 1912), [unnumbered p. 14]: "He slips me a full ration or so every time the leatherneck sentry takes a nap – good old leather neck. Thirty days in the brig on bread and water is like a furlough, By Heck." (d) Edward C. Colby, *The Haversack and Ditty Box* (n.p., 1913), p. 4: (PREFACE), "If these verses shall bear a message to the great American Public, affording it a better understanding of the 'Leatherneck,' the 'Doughboy' and the 'Gob,' I shall consider my work well done." p. 7: (DEDICATION), "The 'Leathernecks,' the 'Doughboys' and the 'Gobs,'/Of censure, sneers, and insults get full due." p. 45: (NOSTALGIA), "All in uniform on deck;/Cleaned her up for show:/'Middie,' 'gob' and 'leatherneck' –/Oh, how well I know!" p. 68: (Notes), "LEATHERNECKS – A name applied to the men of the marine corps. Their former full dress coat had a leather strap between the collar and the throat. The garment in question has been abolished." (e) James F. J. Archibald and Berton Braley, "Soldiers and Sailors, Too," *Collier's*, LIII (May 16, 1914), 12/2: "They are a tight little squad, these 'leathernecks'..."

U.S.M.C. as 'Useless Sons Made Comfortable.'"[30] The loose handling of facts and the implication that the leather stock was worn only by the Marines are amply illustrated by the various emanations from Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, in fostering the development of "leatherneck" as a nickname capable of suggesting an image of an outfit consisting of "he-men."

An illustration of how good publicity value could be obtained by the manipulation of the facts through slight deviations from the truth is contained in the following:

> His [the Marine private's] coat was dark blue with the present red trimming showing at the throat and around the collar, in deference to the fashion of the days from 1840 to around the Civil War period, his collar cut open in front and within was worn the black stock of soft leather which earned the name of "leathernecks" for the Marines and which since has never been regarded as an opprobious title.
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> On account of the persistency with which this term has been used in an affectionate way in referring to the Marines who did duty in the various wars of the country, from the time of the Mexican War, through the Civil conflict and down to the days of the Spanish-American War, it may be mentioned that, in the files of the Quartermaster Department, in the time of 1859, especial attention is given to the construction of the Marine collar.[31]

In all the definitions, explanations and illustrations of the term that have been found in both British and American sources, and that have antedated World War I, there has been no indication nor suggestion that the term contained any overtones of disparagement except for the 1896 illustration of the adjective "leathernecked." The existence of a derogatory usage was finally indicated by a "Chief Printer, U. S. Navy" in the following:

> Leather Neck – A Marine. In the old navy – many years ago – the marines wore a high stand-up collar which was lined with soft leather. The term has never been discarded, how-

[30] Willis John Abbot, *Soldiers of the Sea* (New York, 1918), p. 4.

[31] Edward B. Waterworth, "The Uniform of 1859," *The Recruiters' Bulletin*, III (October, 1917), 7.

> ever, for we hear it as much to-day as ever. Sailormen and marines were – years ago – always at loggerheads and the gob generally picked a name for him that he thought the marine would not like, or one that would get his goat.[32]

The impact of any derogatory usage must have been insignificant in its effect. The Marines themselves used it as a self-applied term and were proud of it. In fact, it was used in the name of an unofficial weekly newspaper, sponsored by the Y.M.C.A., that began publication in 1917 for the newly opened camp in Quantico. How or why the term was selected to be incorporated into the title of *The Quantico Leatherneck* does not seem to be a matter of record. It has survived in the form of the present-day quasi-official magazine of the Corps, i.e., *The Leatherneck*. The continued publication of this magazine for almost a half century, probably more than any other single factor, has perpetuated the term and has contributed to its widespread usage.

Official approval of the term can be imputed to the time when permission was given for the newspaper, with the term as a part of its name, to commence publication.[33] It may be more accurate to place the date in 1920 when *The Leatherneck*, now published as a magazine, came under the benign aegis of the Marine Corps Headquarters.[34]

Also cloaked with the mantle of "official approval" is one of the explanations of the origin of the term. The often repeated assertion that the stock formerly worn by Marines was something special, i.e., "The fame of the black leather stocks lives to-day in the epithet

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[32] Logan E. Ruggles, *The Navy Explained* (New York, 1918), p. 89.

[33] *The Quantico Leatherneck*, I, No. 1 (Saturday, November 12, 1917), p. 3/1. The masthead contained the following information: "The Marines Paper." and "Published by the United States Marines by special permission of Brigadier General John A. Lejeune, U.S.M.C. under the auspices of the Quantico Y.M.C.A."

[34] After about four months the Y.M.C.A. felt that the paper was well enough established to withdraw from the picture, and reference to it was deleted from the masthead. By September, 1918, the name-plate was changed to the shorter title of *The Leatherneck*. The masthead continued to announce: "Published by the United States Marines," but on July 10, 1920 it was changed to read: "Published by the U. S. Marine Corps Institute." The issue of November 13, 1920, p. 1, carried the news that *The Leatherneck*, as a part of the Marine Corps Institute, was transferred to Washington, D.C., and stated that the MCI would "operate directly under the Major General Commandant."

'leathernecks,'" made its initial appearance immediately after World War I in a quasi-official publication.[35] Of even greater weight of authoritativeness as "official" was its appearance in a discussion of the uniform of 1798 contained in an officially sponsored historical project:

> Black leather stocks ... were supplied ... The fame of the leather stocks lives today in the good-natured sobriquet of "Leathernecks."[42]

[42] Burrows to Edwards, January 9, 1799.[36]

The above seems to contain the suggestion that the term existed in 1799, but the cited letter does no more than confirm the date as the earliest known for the inclusion of a leather stock as a part of the Marine uniform:

> Lt. P. Edwards.
>
> You have below an account of the dress tho' as you already know it is hardly necessary, ...
>
> Stocks & clasps 1 to Each Leather
>
> W. W. Burrows[37]

The same misleading suggestion was repeated at a later date in another issue of the quasi-official publication:

> Black Leather stocks were supplied as part of their uniform to the Marines of 1798. And the officers wore these stocks, too. For instance an order dated March 25, 1804, directed Marine officers to wear "black leather stocks when on duty." The fame of the leather stocks lives today in the good-natured sobriquet of "Leathernecks."[38]

[35] [Edwin North McClellan], "The Early Years of the Marine Corps," *The Marine Corps Gazette*, IV (September, 1919), 265.

[36] Edwin North McClellan, *History of the United States Marine Corps*, Mimeographed (Washington, D.C., 1925), I, Ch. xi, 19.

[37] "Letter," *Letters Sent & Accounts of First Commandant*, January 9, 1799 (National Archives, Record Group No. 127, Entry 1). Perhaps McClellan used the foregoing citation to indicate the earliest known Marine Corps mention of the leather stock as he could have cited several other sources dated in 1798 that mentioned "Stocks and Clasps," "Stock of black Leather & Clasp," and "Black, leather stock & Clasp."

[38] The Historian, "Why We Are Called 'Leathernecks,'" *The Marine Corps Gazette*, XVI (May, 1931), 62.

The effectiveness of the efforts by the Marines to identify the term as one of the "home-grown" variety instead of being a borrowed term has been quite successful. Representative of the general acceptance of the "official version" is:

> Uncle Sam's soldiers of the sea have had quite a few nicknames wished upon them, but few of them survive as well as the term "Leatherneck." At times they have been called Devil Dogs, Gyrenes, and one audacious person called them "Seagoing Bellhops," but Leatherneck meets with the official approval of the U. S. Marines.
>
> The Marines come by the term honestly. It is a sort of an heirloom left to them by the lads of the Civil War, who wore the queer leather stocks that were a part of the uniform of those days.[39]

It is rather surprising that one historian of the Corps, who had made the honest statement that "certain traditional accounts of episodes in the history of the Corps were not [in his opinion] founded on facts,"[40] accepted and blithely repeated the Marine fable:

> Black leather stocks were early adopted as part of the uniform, hence the term "Leathernecks."[41]

The foregoing allegation, discussed in the several preceding paragraphs, is widely accepted and believed. This acceptance aptly demonstrates, as a practical application, the concept that any as-

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[39] Loren T. Casey, "Dubbing the Doughboy And Other Service Men," *Our Army*, I (October, 1928), 11/1.

[40] Clyde Hill Metcalf, *A History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York, 1939), p. viii. Eighteen years later another wrote: "It seems time to cease resorting to fiction and face up to certain truths... The proud traditions of the Corps constitute its richest possession, but there is sufficient ground for this heritage based on fact alone to preclude the necessity of having to manufacture additional embellishments out of whole cloth. This is especially true when ersatz 'traditions' readily can be exposed as pure fabrication, thus devaluating our true legacy by tainting everything with suspicion. To attack such myths may evoke loud wails of anguish in the ranks of the recruiting sergeants and snarls of 'Heresy!' from some of our would-be historians; notwithstanding, it is time we faced up to the truth... So let's stop gilding the lily." See: John H. Magruder, III, "A Touch of Tradition," *The Marine Corps Gazette*, XLI (November, 1957), 34–35.

[41] Metcalf, p. 40.

sertion (even though unsupportable) need only be repeated with an insistent frequency in order to be generally believed. Those, who have been duped, often refuse to tolerate any contradiction. An astounding illustration of this intolerant attitude was placed in the limelight several years ago when retired Brigadier General William Baggerly McKean pointed out some of the "unrestrained Marine ballyhoo" and the shortcomings of some of the "flagrantly exaggerated" traditions of the Corps. A news item commented: "Growled Major General R. B. Luckey, commanding officer at Camp Lejeune: '... How the hell would I know? But I've believed it for 33 years, and I'm going to go right on believing it.'"[42]

The Marines now find themselves in the awkward position of unwittingly having provided a verification for the age-old notion that marines are gullible. It does seem somewhat ironical that their blind acceptance of a fanciful explanation of the term, of which they have become so fond, serves as a clear-cut illustration of an American nineteenth century phrasing of the gibe, i.e., "Tell the marines such tales, and you'll deceive 'em. / 'Twont do to tell the Tars – the sailors won't believe 'em."[43]

For some unknown reason, the Army's use of a leather stock has been completely ignored not only by the Marines but also by the Army "files" in all of the present day efforts to "glamorize" it in attempts to explain the origin of the term "Leatherneck."[44]

In the various bombastic Marine accounts of the "now famed leather stock," the implications seem to be that there was something virtuous, noble, and praiseworthy in the fact that the leather stock was once an item of the Marine uniform. The impression is also conveyed that the leather stock was peculiar to the Marine Corps and that its use was restricted to that of the Marines alone.

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[42] "How Semper Fi?" *Time*, LXXVII (February 24, 1961), 15/3. See: William Baggerly McKean, "Harry Truman Was Right When He Slammed The Marines," *Cavalier*, XI (March, 1961), 10–13, 75–80.

[43] William Knight Northall, *Macbeth Travestie* (1843), Act II, Scene i, lines 64–65, in *The Minor Drama*, XXXVI (New York, 185.), p. 23.

[44] "Stocks and Clasps" was a frequent entry under "Class IX" property in the War Department accounts antedating the founding of the Marine Corps. See: Commissary General of Purchases, *Journal of Superintendent of Military Stores* (1797–1802), (National Archives, Record Group 92, Entry 1, Volume 4 of 11), passim.

Actually, there is no more validity to an allegation that the leather stock of bygone days belonged exclusively to the Marines than there is to either the claim that "Leatherneck" originally referred to the American Marine or the unsupportable assertion that the leather stock was originally designed as a "protection for the jugular vein from saber strokes."

In regard to an earlier existence of the leather stock, there is no real need to be concerned with any uniforms other than that of the Royal Marines and of the American Army. Even though most of the early British records have been destroyed and are no longer available, it has been identified as part of the uniform of the Royal Marines in 1768.[45] Detailed descriptions of the early American Army uniform are not available at this time,[46] but it is known that the leather stock was worn during the Revolutionary War.[47]

In the absence of other preserved records, 1813 seems to be the earliest identified year for which the "leather stock" was prescribed for wear by Army officers,[48] but a "silk stock" was worn

[45] John MacIntire, Lieutenant of Marines, *A Military Treatise on the Discipline of the Marine Forces when at Sea, etc.* (London, 1763), in Cyril Field, *Britain's Sea-Soldiers* (Liverpool, 1924), I, 125.

[46] Asa Bird Gardner, "Uniforms of the American Army," *Magazine of American History*, I (July, 1877), 492: "For an earlier period the records of the War Department, in consequence of the fire of 8th November, 1800, and the invasion of 24th August, 1814, contain but very meagre information on the subject."

[47] George Washington, *Writings*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, D.C., 1933), X, 386: (Letter to The Committee of Congress with the army, dated January 29, 1778.) "To make soldiers look well and bestow proper attention and care upon the cloathes, they ought to receive them at stated periods... The periods I would fix upon for delivery are on the first days of June and January. In June should be given a waistcoat with sleeves, flannel, if to be had, two pair of linnen overalls, one shirt, a black stock of hair or leather,..." See: (a) Washington, *Writings* (1937), XVIII, 59, fn. 9: "According to Assistant Clothier Gen. John Moylan's letter of Mar. 1, 1780, to Tench Tilghman, the clothing then in store amounted to: '... 2396 Stocks.' Moylan's letter is in the *Washington Papers.*" (b) *Journals of the Continental Congress* (Washington, D.C., 1912), XX, 664: "Monday, June 18, 1781. *Resolved*, ... That all non-commissioned officers and soldiers, who are or may hereafter be inlisted during the war, be annually furnished with one regimental coat, full made; ... [one leather or worsted stock][1] ... also, ... one stock-clasp, every two years... [1] The words in brackets are in the committee report, but not in the Journal."

[48] U. S. War Department, *Changes in the Uniform of the Army of the United States, May 1, 1813:* "OF THE GENERAL STAFF ... BLACK STOCK – of leather or silk."

during the Revolutionary War. The "leather stock" continued to be an item of the American Army uniform until 1871 when its use was discontinued.[49]

Before the Navy Department came into existence in 1798, the nucleus of both the new Navy and a new organization, soon to be called a "Marine Corps," was authorized by Congress and came into being under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of War.[50] Consequently, it was the Secretary of War who designated the first uniform for the Marines.[51] When the Marine Corps changed from its embryonic state of 1797 under the War Department to its de jure existence during the following year,[52] it was the Army uniform that was being worn.[53]

Even though the "leather stock" originally was issued to the Marines by the American Army, many Marines continue to look upon it as something of Marine Corps origin. An almost worshipful attitude has been developed among many of them for the so-called "fame of the black leather stock."[54]

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[49] U. S. War Department, *General Orders No. 37* (April 4, 1871), p. 1: "Leather stocks will be dispensed with." As the specifications for the "black leather stock" were given as "according to pattern," there is little information concerning it other than that its price fluctuated from a low of seven cents to a high of fifteen cents between 1821 and 1871, and that it was issued to enlisted men during the first and third years of their enlistment. This information can be found in the various issues of: (a) *General Regulations for the Army*; (b) Commissary General's Office of Purchases, *Statements*, annually to 1827; and (c) War Department, *General Orders*, from 1827 through 1871.

[50] "An Act Providing a Naval Armament," (July 1, 1797), 1 *U. S. Statutes* 423.

[51] U. S. War Department, Secretary of War (James McHenry), *Uniform For the Navy of the United States of America*, (August 24, 1797), in U. S. Navy Department, Office of Naval Records and Library, *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi-War Between the United States and France* (Washington, D.C., 1935), [I], 12.

[52] "An Act for the Establishing and Organizing a Marine Corps," (July 11, 1798), 1 *U. S. Statutes* 594.

[53] Even as late as August 6, 1798, almost a month after the Marine Corps was established, the War Department continued to furnish the uniform to the Marines. Included under "Sundry Accounts" for that date, the entry of "[Class] IX. Marine Department" lists "Stocks and Clasps" from Army Stores as "Delivered ... to the Marines." See: *Journal of the Superintendent of Military Stores*, p. 163. Cf. John H. Magruder, III, "U. S. Marine Corps, 1797–1804," *Military Collector & Historian*, VIII (Spring, 1956), 15; Magruder, *MCG* (1957), 34/2; Robert H. Rankin, *Uniform of the Sea Services* (Annapolis, 1962), pp. 124–126; Robert Debs Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea* (Annapolis, 1962), p. 29.

(Footnote 54 see next page)

The "official flavor" that has been given to the term through the discussion of it by Marine writers, in both their official and private capacities, has tended to make the "fiction" appear as "fact." The official, quasi-official, and private publications of histories, guide books, hand books, and periodicals have alleged that the term is traced to the Marine usage of the leather stock. They have baldly stated that the term had its origin in American speech. With this type of "official approval" being bruited, it is not at all strange that many have accepted the explanations in the spirit of "consequently, they must be true."

Some person, unidentified at this time, with a vivid imagination felt impelled to add color to the so-called "fame of the black leather stock." The fanciful yarn that he concocted alleged that the leather stock represented a piece of neck armor for the Marine's protection when he was engaged in hand-to-hand combat while a member of a boarding party. This far-fetched tale, that the leather stock was worn to protect the jugular vein from slashes by the enemy's cutlass, gained a surprising currency during and after the World War II period. Towards the end of the 1950 decade, for example, a Marine recruiting officer in New York City appeared on the Dave Garroway television morning program of "Today" (National Broadcasting Company) as a participant in a brief tribute to the Marine Corps in commemoration of its "Birthday." In all seriousness, he related the above yarn in explaining the origin of "leatherneck."

There have been many who have added their support to this fanciful yarn and have enlarged upon it. These "tellers-of-tall-tales" seem to be unaware that the leather stock was a standard item of the uniform in most of the armies of continental Europe; that it was

[54] Many Marine writers have laboriously attempted to unearth references to early usages of the "leather stock" by the Marine Corps. In the absence of documentary evidence, they have been determined to provide an even greater atmosphere of age for the term "Leatherneck" through an "association of ideas." They have resorted to "reading between the lines," and have attributed unverified assumptions as so-called "facts" to certain periods of history to justify the sought-after early dates. By the deliberate slanting of some of the so-called "facts," the allegations have been made to appear authentic and have been accepted as averments, as, for example, in the following: Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea*, p. 29, "Although Lieutenant Jenison's requisition [April 11, 1778] failed to include such other items, the Continental Marines wore ... leather stocks. The leather stock ... provides the origin of the nickname 'Leatherneck.'"

also worn by both the British soldier and the British marine; and, that the function of the stock was to enhance the military appearance of the wearer. It is abundantly clear in the various issues of the uniform regulations for the American Army that the leather stock was to be worn as a part of the "Dress" and "Undress" uniforms. There is no indication that it was ever intended for or that it would ever be used as a part of the "field," "combat," or "fatigue" uniforms.

The Marine detachments on board ship never constituted the boarding party of any ship by themselves alone. The boarding parties were composed almost entirely of sailors who were drawn by units from the gun crews serving the ship's guns. Whenever a Marine participated in a boarding, it was only when he had been assigned to a particular gun crew, and, as a member of that gun crew, had been designated as a member of the boarding party. The only armor, that has ever been issued for boarding purposes, was a heavy leather cap, crossed with two strips of iron, covered with bearskin, designed to protect the head.[55] Apparently, this type of armor protection, i.e., the leather cap, received only very limited use.

The "neck armor" theory concerning the leather stock probably had been bandied about long before it appeared in print. That, which was probably the first printed appearance, was presented more or less as an off-hand remark:

> Leatherneck, incidentally, is a title that came to be applied to marines in the days of wooden ships, when soldiers of the sea wore leather collars reaching from collar bone to ear, to protect the neck and jugular vein from boarding pike and cutlass.[56]

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[55] Edgar Stanton Maclay, *A History of the United States Navy from 1775 to 1893* (New York, 1893), I, 31–32.

[56] John Houston Craige, *What the Citizen Should Know About The Marines* (New York, 1941), p. 18. On the heels of the preceding publication, the so-called "explanation" was repeated with surprising frequency in a short period of time. See: Cedric W. Windas, *Traditions of the Navy* (Brooklyn, 1942), p. 63; Norman V. Carlisle, *The Marines in Review* (New York, 1943), p. 36; Joseph Israels, II, *He's In the Marine Corps Now* (New York, 1943), p. 28; George Avison, *Uncle Sam's Marines* (New York, 1944), p. 8; Bruce Chapman, *Why Do We Say Such Things?* (New York, 1947), p. 150; Arthur Ainsley Ageton, *The Naval Officer's Guide*, 4th

The yarn must have been in existence prior to 1941 as it was referred to as "tradition" in 1945. A span of four years is scarcely sufficient to classify a "tale" as a "tradition." At this time there was a gentle repudiation of the "neck armor theory" from a semi-official source:

> The term "Leatherneck" as applied to Marines is widely used but few people associate it with the uniform. The fact that United States Marines wore a black leather stock, or collar, from 1798 until 1880 may have given rise to the name. According to tradition the stock was originally worn to protect the jugular vein from the slash of a saber or cutlass. However, official records fail to bear this out.[57]

A more definite scotching of the "tale" came at a later date in a different semi-official publication:

> Considerable legend has attached itself to this article of clothing [leather stock], the most oft-repeated anecdote assigning to the leather stock the dubious properties of armor plating intended to ward off enemy swords. However, uniform regulations only called for the wearing of the stock with full dress and its design was such as to make it very difficult, if not impossible, to aim a musket while worn, since it very effectively resisted any effort to bend the neck – a necessary movement in sighting along a barrel. Thus, it is improbable that it was ever worn in battle.[58]

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ed. (New York, 1951), p. 129; Sally Hunter Jerome and Nancy Brinton Shea, *The Marine Corps Wife* (New York, 1955), p. 52; Robert Calvin Whitford and James R. Foster, *Concise Dictionary of American Grammar and Usage* (New York, 1955), p. 79/1; Cleon E. Hammond, *The Marine Corps from Civilian to Leatherneck* (New York, 1958), p. 86.

[57] The Leatherneck Association, *Guidebook for Marines* (Washington, D.C., 1945), p. 3. Apparently, Karl A .Schuon has attempted to re-establish the fiction that the leather stock was an integral part of the Marine combat uniform of the past rather than merely an item to complete the dress uniform. In a book (of which he is editor), compiled from selected articles previously published in the magazine *The Leatherneck* (of which he is managing editor), he used the cited paragraph as a quotation on the bastard title page, but had deleted the last sentence. See: *The Leathernecks* (New York, 1963), [p. i].

[58] John H. Magruder, III, "A Touch of Tradition," *Marine Corps Gazette*, XL (November, 1956), 37/1.

Other explanations of the origin of "leatherneck" have been offered. In commenting on the speech of the troops in World War I, Mencken said:

> Even *gob*, *doughboy* and *leatherneck* were not new. *Gob* and *leatherneck* had been in use in the navy for a long while, ... *Leatherneck* needs no explanation. It obviously refers to the sunburn suffered by marines in the tropics.[59]

The "sunburn theory" that Mencken claimed was "obvious" did not receive any further mention in his later writings. In fact, in his "corrected" edition, he offered an entirely different explanation, but he also indicated that he held some reservation concerning it:

> *Leatherneck*, I have been told, originated in the fact that the collar of the Marines used to be lined with leather. But the Navy prefers to believe that it has something to do with the fact that a sailor, when he washes, strips to the waist and renovates his whole upper works, whereas a Marine simply rolls up his sleeves and washes in the scantier manner of a civilian. It is the theory of all gobs that all Marines are dirty fellows. But the step from unwashed necks to leather seems to me to be somewhat long and perilous.[60]

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[59] Henry Louis Mencken, *The American Language*, 2d ed. (New York, 1921), p. 370.

[60] Henry Louis Mencken, *The American Language*, 4th ed. (New York, 1936), p. 574. See: (a) George William Stimpson, *A Book About a Thousand Things* (New York, 1946), pp. 234–235: "This theory [sunburn], however, is not so probable as it appears at first blush. If sunburned necks had suggested the term it would be applied to the sailor rather than the marine, for the sailor's collar is cut low in the back and fully exposes the neck to the sun, while the marine's neck is protected by a high, close-fitting collar, making sunburn of the neck impossible. Many sailors maintain that *leatherneck* originally referred to the dark and leathery appearance of a dirty and long-unwashed neck. It may be a myth, but according to Navy tradition marines in the early days were dirty of person. In sailor slang, washing without removing the undershirt and jumper is called a "leatherneck" or "marine wash." When a sailor washes, according to the sailors, he usually strips to the waist and washes his face, neck and arms; but when a marine washes he does so after the fashion of civilians, that is, he merely takes off his coat and rolls up the sleeves of his shirt to the elbows and washes his hands to the wrists and his face to the neck. That, at any rate, was the version formerly given by sailors." (b) *Chanwos Chats* (Vallejo, California, January 1, 1926), in *American Speech*, I (March, 1926), 354/2: "Do you know where the term 'Leatherneck' for a Marine originated? It is an old Navy ex-

Another writer reported the possibility of linking "leatherneck" to "roughneck":

> leatherneck. There have been some amusing guesses as to why this should be the standard nickname for a marine. Some have thought "roughneck" might furnish a clue; others have investigated the leather-producing qualities of a tropical sunburn. It is now generally agreed, however, that it was a term of ridicule applied by the sailors of the gay nineties, whose Adam's apples were not muzzled, to the marines, whose uniforms included high leather stocks.[61]

After mentioning both the "sunburn" theory and the explanation that the term "is used because marines are tough fighters," another writer goes on to say:

> Actually, there are three suggested origins for leatherneck; all may be correct. The first explanation ... protecting the neck and jugular vein ...
>
> Another suggestion is that the marines are called leathernecks because their first issued uniform (1804) included stiff leather collars, or stocks ...
>
> It also has been suggested that the black leather stocks were issued to avoid the powder which dressed the queued hair worn aboard ship in the first decade of the nineteenth century. In 1807 it was estimated that it took $150 yearly to keep the hair of a thousand marines whitened properly ...

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pression, and common to not only our service, but to the English Navy also. In the realm of slang it is ancient, and the origin not far to seek. However, we find even so eminent a philologist as Mencken slipping when he writes, in 'The American Language,' the following: 'Leatherneck needs no explanation. It obviously refers to the sunburn suffered by marines in the tropics.' Obviously it refers to nothing of the kind, as the word is derived from the old custom of facing the stiff neck-band of the marine uniform with leather." (c) Mary Paxton Keeley, "A.E.F. English," *American Speech*, V (June, 1930), 380: "... and *leatherneck* came from the color that the tropic suns burned the necks of the marines.[2] ... [2] This is a traditional explanation but compare that given in AMERICAN SPEECH, I, 354, which is probably more authentic."

[61] Alfred Hubbard Holt, *Phrase Origins* (New York, 1936), p. 209. See: William Morris and Mary Morris, *Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins* (New York, 1962), p. 212.

> The last suggestion for pinning the name leatherneck to marines is the author's own. It takes notice of a more visible article than a leathern stock concealed by a high cloth collar – a long rear flap of black leather hanging from the back of the cap to protect the neck from the sun's heat.[62]

The attempt to associate "roughneck" with "leatherneck" makes it necessary to point out that "leatherneck" has been defined as "an uncouth person."[63] Weseen included the term with that definition as an entry under "General Slang,"[64] but without giving any indication of the source. Mencken referred to the dictionary as "an extremely slipshod and even ridiculous work" and, in a footnote, objected to the definition:

> Some of his definitions are howlers, as, for example, "an uncouth person" for *leatherneck* (Tell it to the Marines!), . . .[65]

In spite of Mencken's objection, there was a similar handling of the term in a 1942 publication:

> 147. Ungentility; plebeianism. – . . . 7. Rough; unpolished; crude . . . leatherneck, leathernecked, . . . rough neck, . . .[66]
>
> 391. Unsophisticated person . . . 5. Rough, crude fellow; "roughneck." . . . leatherneck, . . . roughneck, . . .[67]
>
> 636. Athlete; player . . . 18. Strong, husky player. . . . leatherneck, . . . roughneck, . . .[68]

The old leather stock ceased to be an item of the Marine uniform with the issuance of the new uniform regulation in May, 1875. The wording of the new regulation is the cause of the confusion that recently has existed as to when the old leather stock was discon-

[62] Rolfe Boswell, *Leathernecks* (New York, 1943), p. 19.

[63] Elsie Warnock, "Terms of Disparagement in the Dialect Speech of High School Pupils in California and New Mexico Word-List," *Dialect Notes*, V, Part II (1919), 62.

[64] Maurice Harley Weseen, *A Dictionary of American Slang* (New York, 1934), p. 362.

[65] Mencken (1936), p. 570, fn. 1.

[66] Lester V. Berrey and Melvin Van Den Bark, *The American Thesaurus of Slang* (New York, 1942), p. 172.

[67] Berrey, p. 365.

[68] Berrey, p. 627.

tinued as the term was preserved in reference to a new "stock." The description identifies it to be a "tab" rather than a "stock":

> STOCK
>
> A thin black glazed leather strap, three inches long, cut to a point in the centre of the lower edge, one inch deeper than the width of the coat collar; one end sewed to the collar, and the other end caught by a hook and eye.[69]

Unless there is new evidence unearthed of an earlier usage, the year of 1909 will have to be taken as the earliest verifiable date of American usage. The claims that the term is of long standing are invalid, and the attempts to dramatize a generally detested item of the uniform into a symbol of hand-to-hand combat by alleging it to be a protection for the jugular vein are puerile. In short, in the absence of any evidence of American usage antedating 1909, any claim of an earlier usage is merely a conjecture or an unverifiable assumption.

Inasmuch as the term is a Briticism, it may seem pointless to have discussed at length and to have been concerned over the fact that the leather stock was worn in the American Army also and not by the American Marines alone, and that the wearing of the stock by both the soldier and the marine had been discontinued for many years before the term had made its appearance in American speech.

Any attempt to be made to determine the origin of the term will have to be made as an investigation of Bristish speech. That is a problem for the British etymologist. If the leather stock had been discontinued as an item of the British uniform before the term was used, then it is hardly likely that there is any connection between the stock and the term. Nicknames come into being by a relationship to something that provides a continuing suggestion of the term. It is hardly likely that nicknames are created in reference to things that are no longer present.

The known dates of 1890 for British usage and 1909 for American usage indicate only the approximate time when the term was well enough known to be recorded.

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[69] U. S. Marine Corps, *Regulations for the Uniform and Dress of the Marine Corps of the United States ... May, 1875* (Washington, D.C., 1875), p. 7/1.

Rev. Ozanne's theory that the term was introduced into American usage by British sailors enlisting in the American navy is negatived by Grainger pointing out that:

> At the time of which he writes a recent Spanish-American naval engagement had raised so much mirth on the H.M.S.'s messdecks, where it was regarded as an unballeted version of "Pinafore" that few responded to the call, and the few that did, did so in the hope of exchanging a "Life on the Ocean wave" for a more exciting one of a "Fleet's in Port" sailor.[70]

Many allegations have been made that the American usage is one of long duration, but all of them are what McKean has termed "unrestrained Marine ballyhoo." Calculated to give support to that bit of fiction are such writings as: "While the stock has been eliminated from the Quartermaster's Supply Room, the nickname lives on. It all goes back to the early days of our Navy when Jack tar was an easy-going mortal not particularly susceptible to self-discipline." "'Leathernecks.' – The Marines' long-standing nickname, 'Leathernecks,' goes back to the leather stock, or neck-piece, which was part of the Marine uniform from 1775 to 1881." "And though the stock itself is now a museum piece, the nickname 'Leatherneck' has survived down to the present day." "Marines, who were accustomed to the high stocks which accounted for the ancient nickname of 'Leathernecks.'" "U. S. Marines earned this name in 1812." "Well, it dates back to the early days of the Revolution." "The nickname leatherneck was acquired about this time [1804], also." "The name 'Leatherneck,' which today has become symbolic of the Marines' courage and toughness, began to be applied to them in those days [i.e., days of wooden ships such as the Bon Homme Richard]." "The nickname 'Leathernecks,' which has followed them down through the years, relates to the black leather stock worn by the Marines in their early seagoing days." "Sailors gave them that name – from the fact that in 1808 . . ."

The Royal Marine has been called Bootneck, Bullock, Cheeks, Gerine, Joey, Jolly, Port Mahon Sodger, Royal, and Turkey. At other times, he has also been called Galoot, Grabby, and Leatherneck. The last three terms were originally derisive terms for the British soldier[71] and, in that sense, were applied to the Royal Marine.

[70] Grainger, p. 4/2.

(Footnote 71 see next page)

The American Marine has had several nicknames, i.e., Billy Blue,[72] Devil Dog, Guffy, Gyrene, Salt-water Cowboy, and Seagoing Bellhop. However, there has been a penchant among the Marines to borrow and adopt nicknames that were used to designate the Royal Marines. Both the terms "Cheeks"[73] and the term

[71] "Horse marine," in the ordinary sense, has been a jocular term denoting a lubberly or awkward fellow, or one who is "out of his element." In American usage, Captain Jinks, famed in song and story, long has been identified with the humorous term. In the last line of the refrain, he identifies himself further with the words "Though a Captain in the army." With the current usage of "leatherneck" being applied almost exclusively to the American Marine, it is somewhat surprising to come across a present day application of the term to Captain Jinks. See: "Sunday Crossword Puzzle," *The Sunday Star* (Washington, D.C., August 11, 1963), p. F-11: "Down: 76 – Captain Jinks [in eleven letters: solution = leatherneck (instead of the expected 'horse marine')]."

[72] "Billy Blue" was a self-applied nickname that found favor among the Marines from about the Spanish-American War period until well into the World War I period. Its popularity may have been carried along for a number of years, approximately from 1902 to 1918, by the frequent singing of "The United States Marine," (also known as "Billy Blue Marine") which had been adopted by the Marines as their song. For the complete words of the song, see: Maurice Brown Kirby, "The United States Marine," *Metropolitan Magazine,* XV (March, 1902), 367–368. The song begins with:

> You kin blow about yer hero volunteer
> An' yer rough an' ready, steady infantree;
> You kin sing about yer jackie an' kin cheer
> Fer yer neat an' handy, dandy cavalree;
> But of all the sojer men I ever knew,
> An' of all the sailor men I ever seen,
> When there's fun or fuss or fight, the boy to keep in sight
> Is Billy Blue, United States Marine.
>
> An' it's hi Billy, Billy, Billy Blue!
> We think we've got a little job to do:
> We expect to have a fight an' we want it started right,
> So we puts the startin' of it up to you.

[73] "Corporal Cheeks of the Marines on the New Uniform," *Army & Navy Journal,* XI (April 11, 1874), 555/2. This term apparently was used as early as 1841, as related in the experience of a brand-new midshipman: "Several of the midshipmen hung about me, watching a chance to perpetrate their jokes; but a greenhorn like myself, happening to complain to them that he 'could not find Cheeks, the marine anywhere' caused me to smile, . . ." See: William Harwer Parker, *Recollections of a Naval Officer, 1841–1865* (New York, 1883), p. 24.

"Jolly"[74] were borrowed from the British and were used to denote the U. S. Marine.[75] "Leatherneck," originally a British term for the British soldier, has not only been borrowed, but it has been taken over "lock, stock and barrel."[76]

Beginning with the concept and organization of the Marine Corps in 1798, the American Marines have borrowed many things from the British.[77] The "ultimate" in borrowing seems to be achieved in the post World War II innovation of a social function called

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[74] "Per Mare, Per Terram," *Army & Navy Journal*, I (April 16, 1864), 566/1. Even though "Semper Fidelis" has been represented as dating back to 1868 as the motto of the Corps, the motto of the Royal Marines, i.e., "Per Mare, Per Terram," was used by American Marines in both the Latin form and in the English translation until at least 1889. Someone, apparently, forgot to tell a Brevet Lieutenant Colonel about it before he wrote: "The corps has a regular flag of its own. It is blue ... and beneath is a small scroll with the words *Semper fidelis* in gold. *Mare et terram* ("by sea and by land") is the motto of the corps ..." See: James Forney, "The Marines," *The United Service*, n.s. I (April, 1889), 397.

[75] The Marine Corps is so large now that many Marines often designate certain other Marines by such terms as "Airdale," "Crunchy," "Grunt," and "Wing Wiper." In a recent letter to the editor, SgtMaj Harry C. Manion objected to the usage of "Grunt" to denote the Marine rifleman and went on to say: "For reasons journalistic, to call a Marine a nickname seems to add color to the job of being a Marine. 'Grunt' is not 'Leatherneck' nor 'Devil Dog' – these depict a Marine, traditionally and with pride." The Editor's note, of especial interest as it departs from the usual Marine claim that the term is "longstanding," adds: "'Leatherneck' and 'Devil Dog' are nicknames which, true, have been associated with the Marines since WW I. – Ed." GySgt C. W. Jordan, "Sound Off," *Leatherneck*, XLVI (September, 1963), 3/1, 2.

[76] Undoubtedly the publicity-minded Headquarters, particularly since the time the stepped-up recruiting program was launched about sixty years ago, was conscious of the need for a nickname that would conjure up the concept of a "fighting Marine," that is, would connote someone who was "rough and tough." In spite of the then current usage of "Billy Blue," it was quite apparent that such a connotation would not be possible through its use. It sounded too much like "Willie boy," a concurrent derogatory term that implied effeminacy. When "Leatherneck" came along, it seemed tailor-made for the need. It was definitely effective in song, such as "The Leathernecks, the Leathernecks with dirt behind their ears!" Somehow or other, the image of toughness is destroyed if a substitution of terms is made in the song to have it sung as "The Billy Blues, the Billy Blues with dirt behind their ears!"

[77] Indicative of the extent of the borrowings is the comment made almost a half century ago: "Inasmuch as we have been aping the British for a century or more in the matter of uniforms, it does not appear that one more 'ape' will make a great deal of difference to our pride." See: John Marston, "Suggestions and Criticisms on Changes in Uniforms," *The Marine Corps Gazette*, IV (June, 1919), 193.

"Mess Night" with its ritual including the announcement of dinner by fife and drum playing "The Roast Beef of Old England."[78]

As far as the American usage of "Leatherneck" is concerned, it is a borrowed nickname, and it should be acknowledged to be so. Also, as Grainger pointed out above, the term "is as British as London smog" and "the U. S. Marines have no more right to it than they had to the Highland sporan." Even though there has been no reluctance to acknowledge the British origin of other borrowings, there seems to be an attempt to becloud the origin of the term with various unsupported tales and false claims. It may be said that a review of the explanations emanating from various Marine sources is actually a study of how obfuscation has been developed into a fine art.

An example of that "obfuscation" is given below in its entirety so that its presentation will not be altered by any ellipsis. It seems almost incredible that it could have been included in an official publication of Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps. As there has been no recantation, it must be accepted as representing the "official view" concerning the term. The reader, in bewilderment, encounters the introductory passage of: "A legend may be defined as a shining truth that cannot always pass the test of factual accuracy." After trying to puzzle out why a "shining truth," which presumably means a "truth" that is "splendid, illustrious, and conspicuously fine" and one that should be "manifest and clearly evident," should have any trouble in meeting any test of "factual accuracy," the reader goes on to the following:

> The legend is poetry; the fact is prose, and very dull prose it sometimes is.
>
> Here are presented some legends that have been often told. Many of these do not meet even the minimum standards of fact; some have been definitely disproved. Yet the factual

[78] Gerald Garthrae Thomas, Robert Debs Heinl, and Arthur Ainsley Ageton, *The Marine Officer's Guide* (Annapolis, 1956), p. 463. For many years the American Army, as well as the Marine Corps, made a liberal use of British calls. For a long time, only two meals were eaten during the day. The call sounded for the evening meal was "The Roast Beef of Old England" and that for the morning meal was "Peas on a Trencher." Some Marine officers have indicated that they would prefer to hear the more familiar "Chow Bumps" sounded, i.e., the preliminary warning call that "Mess Call" would be sounded within five minutes.

background, either true or false, does not detract from the story. These legends may be classed in Marine terminology as "sea stories" and they are presented as such.

Origin of the Nickname "Leathernecks" for the Marines

It is questionable whether the origin of the term "Leatherneck" can be accepted as a legitimate member of the family of legends. More like a tradition, it is. For there can be no doubt of the origin, considering that the U. S. Marines of three generations wore leather collars. It is as obvious as the nickname "Red" for a recruit with carrot-colored hair and freckles.

Now accepted by Webster as a synonym for Marine, the term "Leatherneck" was derived from a leather stock once worn around the neck by both American and British Marines – and soldiers also. Beginning in 1798, "one stock of black leather and clasp" was issued to each U. S. Marine annually.

This stiff leather collar, fastened by two buckles at the back, measured nearly three and a half inches high, and was practical only for full-dress wear. It could hardly be worn in battle as it prevented the neck movement necessary for sighting along a barrel. It supposedly improved military bearing, by forcing the chin high, although General George F. Elliott, recalling its use after the Civil War, said it made the wearers appear "like geese looking for rain."

The stock was dropped as an article of Marine uniform in 1872, after surviving through the uniform changes of 1833, 1839, and 1859. But by then it was a part of American vocabulary, a word preserved, like so many words, beyond its original meaning.[79]

In British usage, the use of the term can be verified as early as 1890. Although it has been alleged that it was a nickname for the Royal Marine as early as 1888, the dictionary definition of 1890 and Royal Marine Captain Drury's 1896 usage of "leather-necked grab-

[79] Historical Branch, G-3 Division, "Marine Corps Lore," *Marine Corps Historical Reference Series, Number 22* (Washington, 1960), pp. 8–9.

bies" suggest that the earliest British application was to the soldier rather than to the marine.

As to the origin, it is quite obvious that the American leather stock, worn by both the American soldier and the American marine, contributed nothing towards creating the term in British speech. Whatever the actual explanation may be, i.e., whether the term was derived from the British soldier wearing a leather stock or from his "unwashed neck," it should come from a British etymological search. It would seem rather presumptuous for an American to tell the British how a British term was created – even if it has been forgotten that the term was of British creation.

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