

Tale of Two Taverns

BLUF: Samuel Nicholas established the Continental Marine Corps in 1775 by order of *The Continental Congress*. He was given the authority to develop two Marines battalions who were “good sailors,” as they were to serve on ships of the Continental Navy. Tradition holds that Nicholas recruited his Marines at Tun Tavern near Penn’s Landing in the Philadelphia waterfront district. However, another Philadelphia tavern may have been the first recruitment site for Samuel Nicholas.

SETTING THE STAGE: Philadelphia in 1775 was the largest city in British North America with 40,000 residents. The city bustled with activity, especially around its waterfront district. The streets that intertwined with the docks boasted half of the 200 ordinaries and taverns that served the city.

Tun Tavern was one of the district’s largest establishments, standing on the corner of King (later Water) Street and Tun Alley. The building was the “First Brew House” built-in Philadelphia, constructed by Joshua Carpenter in 1685. The name “Tun” means a barrel or keg of beer in Old English. In the 1740s, a restaurant tag, “Peggy Mullan’s Red Hot Beef Steak Club,” was added to the tavern’s name. As the population of Philadelphia increased, along with the business provided by the wharf traffic, many organizations used the tavern for meetings and gatherings. In 1756, Benjamin Franklin used the inn to recruit and gather the Pennsylvania militia to fight Native American uprisings. The tavern later hosted a meeting of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and the Continental Congress. In October 1775, a seven-man Naval Committee, including John Adams, was appointed by Congress to craft war articles to build America’s first naval fleet.

To the east, on the Post Road, stood The Conestoga Wagon Tavern. Built as an ordinary in the early 1700s by John Jenkins, a prominent business leader, the tavern served as a way station along the main north-south route through the colonies. Already a prominent businessman in Philadelphia, Samuel Nicholas became the tavern’s proprietor in the early 1770s. In 1766, Nicholas formed the *Gloucester Fox Hunting Club*, transformed into *The Light Horse of the City of Philadelphia* at the Connostogoe (Conestoga) Wagon. *The Light Horse of the City of Philadelphia* was a “gentlemen’s militia” with Nicholas as the head. In 1778, Nicholas married Mary Jenkins, gaining full ownership of the inn as part of the bride’s dowry.

THE STORY: According to tradition, Tun Tavern was where the Continental Marines held their first recruitment drive. On 10 November 1775, the Second Continental Congress commissioned prominent innkeeper Samuel Nicholas to raise two battalions of Marines in Philadelphia. He had the authority to grant commissions for “one Colonel, two Lieutenant Colonels, two Majors, and other officers as usual in other regiments.”

That same day Nicholas met with close friend Robert Mullan, the proprietor of Tun Tavern, to discuss the Continental Marines’ organization. Mullan recommended several prospects for the officer corps of Marines, meeting several times between the two establishments. Mullan was appointed “Captain of Marines” with the job of chief Marine Recruiter. Nicholas also assumed the rank of Captain, later taking the rank of Major. His responsibility was to organize the officer corps, many of whom came from *The Light Horse of the City of Philadelphia*. Most of the administrative work was completed at the Connostogoe Wagon, though it was decided that the recruitment of enlisted men would take place at Tun Tavern. Tun was an obvious choice because of its location in the waterfront district since the recruits needed to be “good seamen, or so acquainted with maritime affairs.” Mullan’s position in the building also made Tun Tavern a convenient location.

The actual location of the Continental Marines formation has been a lingering question for over two centuries. The correct answer is probably both Tun Tavern and The Connostogoe Wagon. All recruitment of enlisted Marines took place

at Tun Tavern. The Continental Marines' infrastructure was mapped out at both taverns, with the assigning of officer ranks taking place at The Connostogoe Wagon. This explanation is the best way to address any questions concerning the matter.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to learn about the origins of the Marine Corps?
2. What does the story of the two taverns tell us about the Marine Corps' traditions?
3. How can one use these stories to understand the ethos of the Marine Corps better?

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