



RM MUSEUM GUIDE SHEET 44: MARINES ABOARD SHIP

- Marines served as a professional military unit, both ashore and afloat, commanded by their own officers who in turn were directed by the naval Captain of the ship.
- Since 1755 Marines came under the Naval Discipline Act whilst at sea and to conform to the ships' hierarchy it was rare to have a Marine officer above the rank of Captain aboard (equivalent to a naval First Lieutenant). However in larger operations a number of ships' Marine detachments would form into a Battalion to be landed, and on these occasions a Marine officer with the commission of Major or Colonel would assume command ashore.
- From 1804, with the formation of the Royal Marine Artillery, Gunners from this new unit were used on specialist ships such as Bomb Vessels and Mortar Boats.
- They were volunteers and were less likely to 'jump ship' than the pressed seamen. They would be landed with them to deter them from deserting.
- During battle they provided extra manpower to operate the guns, small arms and disciplined musketry defence at close quarters. They would also be used as part of prize crews (to man captured ships) and on occasions assist with boarding parties.
- They participated in attacks on coastal installations and cutting out (capturing) enemy ships at anchor, as well as protecting watering and foraging parties.
- They protected the ship's officers from the crew and were quartered between them.
- They were deployed as sentinels guarding the powder rooms, magazines, the spirit room and other storerooms, and the entrances to the officers' quarters and ships' cells.
- They assisted in the general sailing and maintenance of the ship when unskilled heavy labour was required, such as hauling ropes when the ship was manoeuvring, turning the capstan to weigh anchor, and embarking heavy stores.
- They could not be ordered to go aloft, although if expedient, many did. They could not however, be punished for not showing inclination to do so.
- The Marine detachment would form up on deck for all formal occasions and punishments
- In addition to their military duties, Marine officers would undertake watch duty.
- As the Royal Navy developed into the steam and iron-clad era Royal Marine detachments focused more on manning the new types of naval guns, and gunnery in general. Training was undertaken at HMS Excellent at Portsmouth, whilst the Royal Marine Artillery eventually built sea service training batteries at their Headquarters at Eastney.
- Royal Marines Light Infantry were also trained in naval gunnery and often manned a ship's secondary armament.



ROYAL MARINES MUSEUM

- After 1903 Royal Marines Band personnel were trained to man the gunnery fire control that was being designed into the new Dreadnought Battleships and Battle Cruisers. Along with their secondary roles of stretcher bearers and damage control parties, the sea going RM band musicians performed this task through both the 1914-18, and 1939-45 wars. Due to the location of the Transmitting Station below the waterline, there was a high casualty rate in the band service when ships were lost or badly damaged.
- During the 1914-18 war a mixed RMA and RMLI detachment were to be found on Battleships and Battle cruisers, with one of the main gun turrets being manned exclusively by Royal Marines. A number of the secondary guns would be manned by the RMLI. Royal Marine Buglers would also be deployed to sound calls and signals and run messages. The detachments on older Battleships and Cruisers were usually exclusively RMLI. There were not usually any Royal Marines aboard ships below Cruisers except on special operations or for transporting purposes.
- After the amalgamation of the RMA & RMLI in 1923, Royal Marines continued their detachment roles with the fleet adding AA gunnery to their skills and serving guns on the developing Aircraft Carriers. Royal Marines also became pilots in the Fleet Air Arm squadrons on these vessels.
- During the 1939-45 war Royal Marines manned the many developing types of Landing Craft and support craft such as the gun and flak craft.
- With the decline of naval gunnery after the 1939-45 war, and the development of the Royal Marines as Commandos, the presence of sea service Royal Marines contracted. The naval destroyers and frigates of the 1960s to 1980s would embark a small detachment on specific occasions, but not necessarily as part of the vessels complement. This requirement, and other sea-borne roles, is currently (2004) covered by FPGRM (Fleet Protection Group Royal Marines).
- The Royal Marines continue to man and deploy the Landing Craft, Raiding craft and Hovercraft, associated with their amphibious role. These are currently (2004) the responsibility of 539 Assault Flotilla and 1 Assault Group.



ROYAL MARINES

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COMPLEMENT OF ROYAL MARINES IN EACH RATE.

Rates.	Capt.	Lieut.	Serj.	Corp.	Drum.	Priv.	Total
First-rate . . . guns 100	1	3	4	4	2	156	170
Second rate 98	1	3	3	3	2	138	150
Third rate 80	1	2	3	3	2	130	141
Ditto 74	1	2	3	2	2	115	125
Ditto 64	1	2	2	2	1	82	90
Fourth rate 50	0	2	2	2	1	52	59
Ditto 44	0	2	2	2	1	47	54
Fifth rate 38	0	2	2	2	1	41	48
Ditto 32	0	1	1	1	1	38	42
Sixth rate 28	0	1	1	1	1	27	31
Ditto 20	0	1	1	1	1	26	30
Sloops	0	0	1	1	0	18	20
Gun-brigs	0	0	1	1	0	13	15

When a flag is displayed in a 50-gun ship, the detachment of Marines has a Captain.

Numbers and ranks of Royal Marines in RN Ships 1810 (Steels Navy List)

RM detachments for Battle Cruisers and Cruisers 1939 (Admiralty)

