

# Happy 475th birthday, Spanish Marines!

By Jorge Tierno Rey, Spanish Marine Corps Captain.

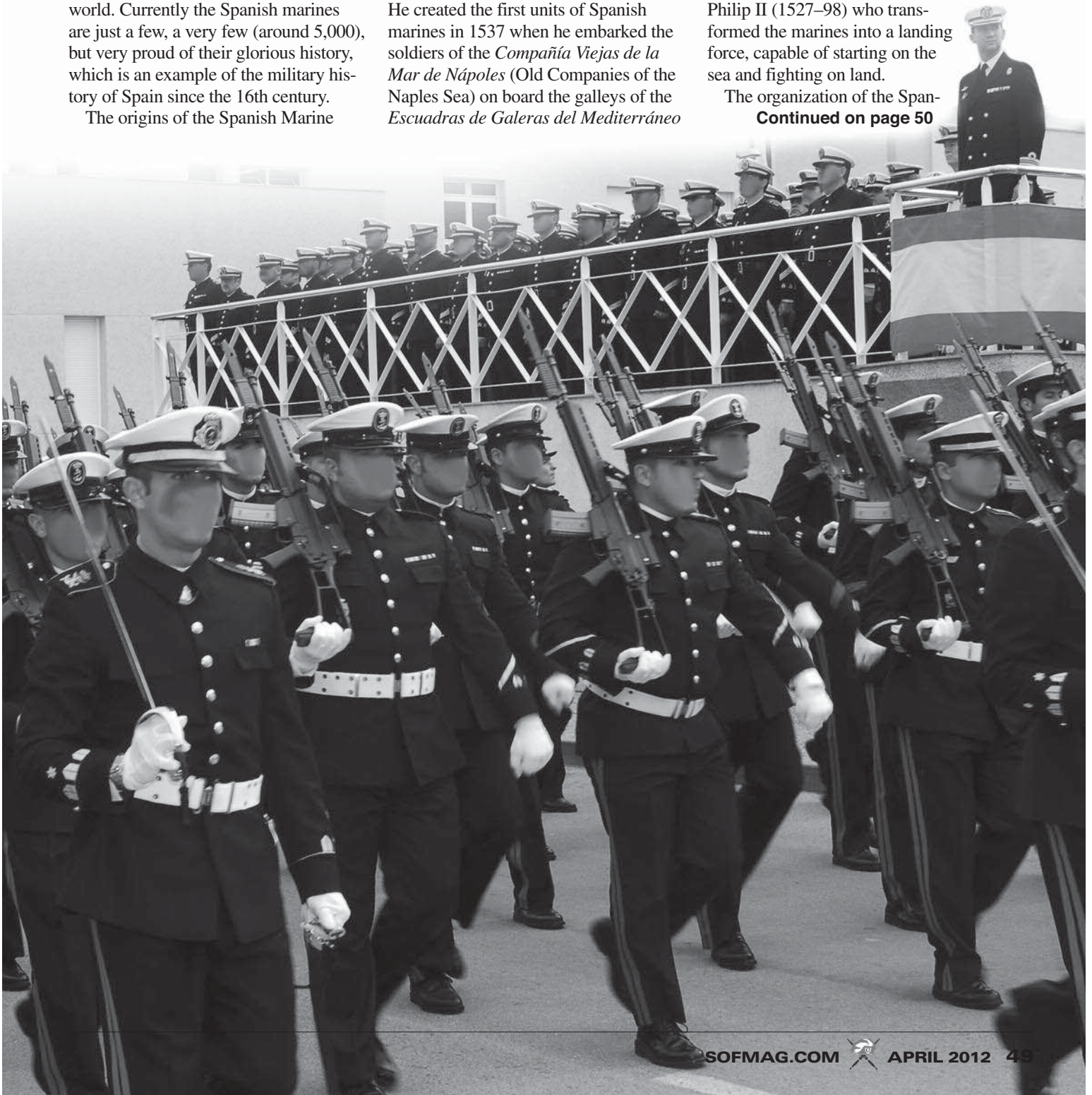
*Braves by land and by sea!* That's the motto of the oldest marine corps in the world. Currently the Spanish marines are just a few, a very few (around 5,000), but very proud of their glorious history, which is an example of the military history of Spain since the 16th century.

The origins of the Spanish Marine

Corps date from the times of Charles I, king of the Spanish empire (1500–58). He created the first units of Spanish marines in 1537 when he embarked the soldiers of the *Compañía Viejas de la Mar de Nápoles* (Old Companies of the Naples Sea) on board the galleys of the *Escuadras de Galeras del Mediterráneo*

(Mediterranean Galley Squadrons), as some kind of boarding force. But it was Philip II (1527–98) who transformed the marines into a landing force, capable of starting on the sea and fighting on land.

The organization of the Span-  
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ish Marine Corps has been changing since its origins and continues to adapt to the times today. But what has never changed is that the Corps belongs to the Spanish Navy; it is not an independent corps. The Corps has surpassed difficulties throughout its history but it has managed to survive forever, thanks to the outstanding performance of its members.

The emblem of the Corps has changed several times through its history. Currently it is composed of two rifles over an anchor beneath a crown. One of the more distinctive features of the current Spanish Marines uni-



form is the two red stripes along the sides of their trousers.


These stripes mean it's a Royal Corps, which is a great honor and privilege. This consideration was earned by the Corps in 1763 because of their successful efforts to defend the *Castillo del Morro* (Castle of the Morro) and the city of La Habana against the attacks of the British in 1762.

The other more distinc-

tive feature is the three *sardinetas*, gold embroidered in each cuff of the jacket. It is said *sardinetas* come from those strips of sandpaper used by grenadiers to strike the match with which to light the wick.

In addition to being the first marine corps in the world, it was the first one to have a female serving in it. That was in 1793, when Ana María de Soto (16 years old), disguised as a man with the name of Antonio María de Soto, joined the 6th Company, 11th Navy Battalion, until she was discovered in 1798 and honorably discharged.

The Spanish Marines have been present all around the world fighting numerous battles. One of the most famous battles was the Battle of Lepanto (1571), where the marine Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, author of the novel *Don Quixote*, was injured.

Every 27th of February we Spanish marines celebrate our birthday. This is our 475th birthday. 475 years serving Spain by land and by sea, in which we have lost a few mates and we have done a great job that will go on 475 years more. Congratulations, Marines! 

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