

CAMP GEIGER
Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina
MAY – AUGUST 1957

In the spring of 2002 I was on a business trip to New Bern, NC. The meeting ended early and Camp Lejeune was only a short distance away. I had not been back to Lejeune since ITR training in 1957. When I arrived at the Camp Geiger main gate the red cones gave me the first clue it was closed.

Before I could complete these photos the duty sentry had challenged me and was on his radio for back up. His Corporal of the guard showed up within minutes and stood at a distance covering us. Wow, did I look that intimidating?

The young Private and I had a nice conversation in which I informed him that a long time ago I had been stationed there and had just stopped with the hope of looking around. I joked with him that 45 years ago they would not let me out, and now I could not get in. He was quick to tell me about how nervous he was over the pending situation in Iraq. I thought of him often during the war and even now in the aftermath.

Anyway, he checked with the Corporal again, but with the 911 security the answer was “No”, I could not look around. He was a nice polite kid and I was impressed. I wished him good luck in the USMC and suggested that even though he might not realize it now, these were some of the best and most exciting times of his life. And if someday, nostalgia were to strike him, he might see himself standing right here talking to another young Marine.

I would not have recognized anything anyway. In the distance Behind the Geiger sign you can see the large modern barracks. In 1957, we were in Quonset huts and it was called Infantry Training Regiment (ITR). It is now School of Infantry.

1. They did not take a Company photo of us in ITR. I wish they had. Mick Putterbaugh has been kind enough to share his photo. After boot camp we were Marines, and in those days this is what we looked like. As you can see from the sign, Mick was in D Company, 1st Bn. 2nd Infantry Training Regiment, Camp Pendleton, California, 30June1958. While hard to make out, Mick is right behind the Company sign in the first row. Seated directly behind the sign are a 1st Lt. (left) and the Captain. Mick is just behind the Lieutenant's left facing shoulder.

My tour at ITR was exactly one year earlier at Camp Geiger. I was in 3rd Bn. 1st ITR, MCB Camp Lejeune, NC. As a six-month reserve we had a full ITR tour followed by an Advanced ITR. At the conclusion I was assigned back to the 7th Rifle Company, Marine Corps Reserve, as an 0331 Machine Gunner. I was stationed at the Naval Air Rocket Test Station (NARTS) at Lake Denmark, Dover New Jersey. In August of 1958, I re-enlisted in the USMC and caught up with Putterbaugh at Pendleton.

2. Main gate sign at Camp Geiger with new barracks in the background.

3. The new "School of Infantry" sign replaces our old ITR identification.
4. The Geiger main entrance with the closed guard shack.
5. In Advanced ITR we had FAM fire introduction to the 60mm mortar.
6. In those days we were also given introductory training with the M2-A1 Flame thrower. I never saw one again for the rest of my time in the Corps. I am sure today there would be great International resistance to using one of these to set the enemy on fire! In WW11, when the objective was to win, this was not the case.
7. Primitive by today's Rocket Propelled Grenade standards, what we had was an attachment for the M-1 that used a specially crimped "blank" grenade cartridge to launch a rifle grenade. There was a whole range of high explosive, chemical and even anti tank options, and it was a hell of a kick to shoulder fire one of these beauties! My Guidebook for Marines says: "Turn your body about 60 or 70 degrees from the line of fire with your feet spread about two feet apart. Lean into your rifle, with your left knee bent and your right leg straight but not stiff". I can tell you from experience the operative phrase was "lean into your rifle"!

Our instruction and FAM fire experience also included crawling under barbed wire with live over head machine gun fire; the 81mm and 4.2 inch "4Duce" mortars; the 106mm recoilless rifle; the 3.5 inch Rocket Launcher; the Browning M1919A4 .30 Cal. Light Machine Gun; the Browning M1918A2 Automatic Rifle or BAR. And, of course, firing the .45 ACP, the M-1 and throwing hand grenades.

By the time ITR and Advanced ITR was complete we were ready for any assignment. After a year in the reserves mine was 4 years in the Fleet Marine Force (FMF) with 1/3/3/3 on Okinawa and G/2/5/1 at Pendleton. As an 0331 my early assignment was in "Guns", but I spent most of my tour as a 3.5" rocket gunner, Anti Tank Assaultman.

Those were the days!