

**MARINE CORPS RECRUIT DEPOT
PARRIS ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA
6 FEBRUARY - 6 MAY 1957**

I remember catching the train in Dover, NJ and changing trains in Washington, DC. Actually several of us deliberately missed the connection in DC, so we could look around Washington. My last act of defiance for months. The train traveled through miles of swamps in NC and SC and I remember thinking "How did they ever build a railroad way out here"? Still a good question, but the answer was probably slaves.

The train arrived at Yemassee, SC in the late afternoon and we transferred to a bus for Parris Island. Everyone was very cordial. I particularly remember the nice guy in charge. Even that first night in the Receiving Barracks was very low key – "gee, this is not so bad". Then at 0530 February 6, 1957 the "shit hit the fan". It started out with the information that after McKeon we can't touch you (yeah right) but we are going to work your ass to death!

Less than a year earlier "On the evening of April 8, 1956, a group of Marines known as Platoon 71 was led by its drill instructor, Staff Sgt. Matthew McKeon, into the murky waters of Ribbon Creek, located on the northwest side of Parris Island, S.C. The exercise was designed to promote discipline within the ranks of 75 would-be Marines, with whom Sgt. McKeon was growing increasingly impatient. What resulted was the drowning of six Marines and the courts-martial of Sgt. McKeon."

The McKeon court-martial had been held at Parris Island during July and August 1956, about six months before I got to PI. In February of 1957 the heavy atmosphere of the trial was still "in the air" and there was a moratorium on physical contact with recruits. The rest was the standard 13 weeks of becoming a Marine.

See my "Overview and Comments" on the recently published book: *Court-Martial at Parris Island – The Ribbon Creek Incident*, by John C. Stevens III. The PDF link is on my Parris Island page.

And, by the way, don't you believe DI's could not, or did not, touch you in 1957!

1. Graduation of Platoon 43. I am in the top row, third from the right. The caption on the photo tells the rest of the story.
2. My Boot Camp Dress Blues photo.
3. Back to the beginning -- what I looked like on February 5, 1957, arriving with my already issued USMCR sea bag.
4. As we moved down the platform we started to have some idea of what we were in for.
5. At the train station there was a Receiving Station with barracks for recruits arriving in the middle of the night. We arrived late afternoon and a bus was waiting to take us directly to Parris Island. At PI we were put in a receiving barracks there that first night until we met our DI's at 0530 the next day.
6. What the Yemassee station looks like today. Gave me some goose bumps to see this old platform. Must have been all the excitement, anticipation, and apprehension I felt that day. It is still an AMTRAK stop but it does not look like Marines arrive here much anymore.

7. A sign/mural painted on the back of a commercial building across from the train station. Roy Hughes who runs the local general store has formed the Yemassee Train Depot Marine Reunion Committee, LLC and sponsors an annual event. The first one drew a couple of hundred former Marines. The 2004 second annual is scheduled for October 15 – 16. Roy can be reached at P. O. Box 265 Yemassee, SC or 843-589-3385.
8. Main Gate, Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) Parris Island, SC. I have been back to PI twice since boot camp. In 1980, I rode a Harley-Davidson there on my way to a South Carolina Dealer meeting. In 1957, I never thought I would be “tooling” around that Grinder on a Wide Glide. I took my sons back in 1984, while we were vacationing at Hilton Head. I do hope to get back again someday and just take one last look at a place I will never forget!
9. A full shot of the Main Gate and the guard shack. As a Marine I only saw this gate twice. Once on the way in, and then over my shoulder on the way out to Geiger.
10. It all seemed so unbelievably large when we were there. In retrospect I think the DI’s used to march us all over and back just to go across the Grinder for a haircut. It seemed like the rifle range was another world until I later learned it was just a short way down Wake Boulevard. Anyway, I really pondered over this shot. There it all is – the infamous Grinder; three platoons marching; our 1st Battalion white clapboard barracks on the right with Port Royal sound behind; the PT field at the bottom; and on the left a full stretch of Boulevard De France, were the Iwo Jima Monument sits near the reviewing stands at the half way point of the grinder. I am not sure what all the buildings on the left are, but I do know 2nd Battalion and the WM quarters were over there.
11. Welcome to receiving! Putting all your stuff in a bag to be sent home and getting your first set of utilities. They were brand new, wrinkled and covered with little white size stickers. And then someone would pull your utility cap down over your ears.
12. By this time you had already met your Senior DI and his juniors. Mine was Staff Sergeant Vincent J. Dipano, Jr., USMC 1929 – 1992. I recently located Sgt. Dipano’s sister in NJ, and was then able to follow two more referrals to his widow, Irene. I had looked for him for years but only with the Internet are these searches now possible.

In 1957, he was a S.Sgt and my SDI. He had subsequently gotten out of the Corps, and the next time I saw him was at Pendleton, after he had reenlisted as a Corporal E-4. To read about this later meeting with him, see my Camp Pendleton photo captions.

Anyway, after I saw him at Pendleton he went to Vietnam early in the conflict and on return got married to Irene. Later, she did not want him to go back to Vietnam, which he was scheduled to do, so he opted out of the Corps again and joined the New Brunswick, New Jersey Police Department where he retired after a full career.

He had had a Quad bypass and was doing well but one day in April 1992, he decided to cut the grass and had a fatal heart attack in the process. When I knew him he was only 28 so my guess was correct that he was just a little more than ten years older than I was. Born in 1929, that made him only 63 at his passing. Hard to realize now that I am 65.

Irene characterized him as a tough little guy who carried his Marine training into his police work. I will **never** forget the first morning I met him!

13. Then there was the “march” to your barracks. Not very straight and all out of step! Ours was not a march. We were forced to run like a herd, stumbling with a seabag full of “issue” and giving all the long termers something to laugh at. Standing at attention outside the mess hall that evening we also got our first introduction to the “Infamous Sand Flea.”
14. Once “home” it was a mad scramble up the ladder, “Ass holes and Elbows” as the DI’s called it.
15. It is amazing to look at this photo and realize how small the inside of those barracks really was. Remember all that standing at attention in front of your “rack”.
16. In boot camp we first started learning about a “Junk on the Bunk”. Here a Captain takes a close look at some leftover WW11, 782 gear. In those days we were allowed to dress down to t-shirts BECAUSE THERE WASN’T ANY AIR CONDITIONING and we were in South Carolina!
17. Here is a great shot of the rifle range. A, B, C and D ranges are clearly visible, as are the 200, 300 and 500 yard lines. The snapping in and school areas are in the foreground. In the background, behind the butts, is the serpentine Ribbon Creek famous since 1956! I don’t recall all the clapboards at the range. We were in Quonset huts just outside this photo on the far right in front of the first range. This may be a later photo, and maybe they moved them from main side as they replaced them there with brick barracks. They would certainly have been an improvement over the huts. Although McKeon talks of being in clapboards in 1956. I just don’t remember them.
18. To learn about the M-1 you sat at attention on bleacher seats.
19. All of us who did this know how cramping a week of “snapping in” can be. I was on the range in March and with the rain and wind I almost froze in a t-shirt and shooting jacket.
20. Marines on the firing line at Camp Matthews. Mick Putterbaugh will remember this location. In his day this was the home of MCRD San Diego, weapons training.
21. The 200-yard line at Parris Island. This is the Range where I qualified, and directly behind the butts is Ribbon Creek. Remember “Lock and load; ready on the right; ready on the left; all ready on the firing line; watch your targets; TARGETS!” The rifle range was a great experience. I only fired Sharp Shooter (210) in boot camp but I went on to qualify as an Expert and became a range coach on Okinawa.
22. The pistol range at Parris Island, where recruits get to FAM (familiarization) fire the Colt .45 or .45 ACP as we called it. I owned my first .45 ACP when I was 15 so by the time I got to Parris Island FAM fire I was already quite familiar with this handgun.
23. Another Camp Matthews shot of their pistol range.
24. This is the way the USMC taught us to fire the .45 ACP. I laugh today when I see all this two-handed stuff. I carried the .45 for my whole USMC tour. First as an 0331 light .30 machine gunner and later as an 0351 3.5 rocket gunner. I still have a .45 ACP and used it to qualify for my concealed carry license in both Texas and North Carolina. One important thing about the USMC. Even though for most of my active duty I carried a .45, I still had to qualify with the M-1 five times in my six years. Every Marine is a rifleman and I am proud to have qualified as Expert with both the .45 ACP and the M-1.

25. The obstacle course was a real challenge then, but would be impossible for me now. I feel a lot different at 65 than I did when I was 17. I did show off to my sons in 1984, and accomplished most of it – but that was 20 years ago. God, I could have retired in just the time since I was last there!
26. The main drill field we all called the Grinder. Except for two weeks in a Quonset hut at the rifle range, this visible last remaining wooden barracks is exact one I lived in during my 1957 stay.
27. Passing in review on the PI grinder during the ending ceremony of Final Field. Today they call the program that precedes this ceremony the Crucible. We accomplished all the same stuff but they did not have a “cool” name for it in my day. We also never heard the term OooRah. We were just told to growl! The low building on the left was the mess hall. The second barracks on the right is where I lived on the top deck, port side. The wash racks were just behind and back there you could walk down to the water and contemplate the swim to Port Royal.
28. Color Guard!
29. Graduation with my barracks directly in the background. The old white wooden barracks are now all gone.
30. “Iron Mike” is one of the best known landmarks at PI. It was erected in 1924, by WW1 Marines in memory of their fallen comrades. Origin of the name “Iron Mike” is unknown.
31. The Iwo Jima flag-raising monument with our squad bay in the background across the Grinder.
32. Me on Boot camp leave. I had gotten in uniform to go to Radio City in New York City to see the just released movie *The DI* starring Jack Webb. Even though just a Private I looked pretty salty with that dip in my barracks cover. My bill was spit shined, belt cut to exact length, and remember that little wire thing we used to make our tie knot stick out. Tropical cover is long since gone but I still have the winter green hanging right here beside my desk. When I look at this photo I see a kid with it all in front of him, when I look in the mirror I see a old man with it all behind. Where did it all go 1956 – 2006! I joined the USMCR 50 years ago this October 15th.
33. This photo entitled "The Living Emblem of the United States Marines" was taken in 1917, and includes 9,000 enlisted and 100 officers. Based on the probable size of the USMC then, this could very well represent a large portion of the entire Corps. The picture was most likely taken from a ground secured balloon or a blimp, given the “Marine Aviation” capabilities of the day. At the time of the photo Brigadier General J.H. Pendleton was Commanding General at "Marine Barracks Parris Island South Carolina."

Major Joe Madagan initially provided this wonderful historical photo. A later version with more detailed information came from Marine Mustang CWO-4 Frank Kovacs USMCR (Ret). Gunner Kovacs also proudly served as a “DI at PI” in K Company 2nd Bn from May 1958 until April 1960, and is a life member of the Marine Corps Drill Instructor Association.

One thing that still amuses me occurred on our transfer from Parris Island to Camp Lejeune. At the halfway point the convoy stopped and we were all issued a box lunch from a contractor that operated out of a “shack” on the side of the road. I remember clearly it had one of those pull up/drop down “service windows” on a pulley.

We were allowed to get out and walk around and I stood there on the side of the road looking up and down the beach. There was nothing as far as the eye could see in either direction except our little

lunch stand. I remember thinking “Man, this is a beautiful beach, I’ll bet somebody does something with this someday”. It was Myrtle Beach!