

## 1956 - 1963

"The Marines we are turning out today at Parris Island can cut the mustard with any Marine who ever lived and fought." - General David M. Shoup



### CHAPTER | SIX

## CHANGE SHAPES THE ISLAND



After WWII numerous changes occurred on the depot. More than 150 unserviceable buildings were demolished or moved off the depot. New construction began to replace Quonset huts with new brick barracks. Housing expansion took place at Ribaut Village for sergeants and below and apartments were built along Wake Boulevard for staff NCOs.

In 1956 the training philosophy that produced so many Marines with exceptional combat credentials came under national and world scrutiny following the Ribbon Creek training incident. As a result, recruit training was modified to provide closer supervision and a mandatory standardized curriculum.

In August 1956, the women's battalion had 11 officers and 129 enlisted persons to train 160 recruits. This number included nine female and three male drill instructors, who boasted the women could drill as well as or better than the men. A second major personnel change was the integration of black recruits. For all practical purposes blacks were excluded from the Marine Corps until 1942, and even then their numbers were small.

An expanded physical training program of 84 hours was one of the most obvious and important features of General Wallace M. Greene's reforms. In 1956, the recruits' physical training uniform consisted of tennis shoes, red baseball hats, red shorts, and gold T-shirts bearing the letters "USMC."



November 3  
 UPCOMING PAYDAYS  
 Officers ..... Nov. 15  
 Staff NCOs and Sgts. .... Nov. 15  
 Corporals and Below .... Nov. 20

**PARRIS ISLAND BOOT**

ACCIDENT RECORD

This Week	4
Last Week	1
This Year	124
This Time Last Year	126

Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, S. C.

Friday, November 10, 1961

**1775 - Builder Of Marines - 1961**



**Women Marines Now Trained With New System**

**Platoon 7-A First Graduated Under Streamlined Schedule**

A new training program has been established by Woman Marine Recruit Training Bn. Platoon 7-A, the first to complete training under the new program, graduated last Thursday.

Previously, Woman Marine recruits went through six weeks of basic recruit training, followed by a four-week General Office Procedures Course.

Under the new program, the two separate units have been incorporated into a single nine-week course, composed of two phases.

A recruit's day begins at 5:15 a.m., although her scheduled activities do not begin until 7 a.m. when personnel inspection is held.

Phase I consists of 30 actual training days, lasting 6 weeks. During this phase, recruits receive instructions in close-order drill, uniform regulations, Marine Corps history, interior guard, the Uniform Code of Military Justice, first aid, personal hygiene, military customs and courtesies, and other basic subjects.

Phase II contains 24 training days devoted to instruction in basic business procedures. The subjects covered in this phase include: English, spelling, administration, correspondence, military publications, and the Marine Corps Directives system.

Upon completion of both phases of recruit training, recruits, not to exceed 10 per cent of the graduating platoon, who have displayed exceptional ability and devotion to duty may be promoted meritoriously to Private First Class.

Most of the recruits board buses the following morning, bound for their permanent duty stations. Others are sent to schools and are permanently assigned after graduation from school.



**PRIVATE** Gretchen K. Ward of Little Rock, Ark., is greeted by her platoon sergeant, Cpl. Mary L. McWard as she steps from a bus at Barracks 802, Pvt. Ward is now a member of Plt. 10-A, which began training July 12.



Platoon 7-A is demonstrated by an instructor, SSgt. [Name] and Pvt. Betty Jo Buttrington, subjects covered during the 13 hours.

**PLATOON SERGEANT** Cpl. Judith M. Hensley receives a glass of punch from Pvt. Linda J. Smith of Plt. 7-A at the reception held by members of 7-A in the lounge of Recruit Barracks. Looking on are Lt. Col. E. E. Hill, CO of WAM Bn., and Pvt. Gerrie A. Crittendon of 7-A.

Visitors to the Depot families of personnel will start a tour of Parris Island at 1 p.m. tomorrow in the Depot Theater, where the Recruit Training Regiment will present a program that explains recruit training from the first day through final review.

After the presentation, guests will witness ten minutes of class

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THE BOOT, Parris Island Weekly

were crowned first and second  
 April 8, 9 and 10. Here, Keglers  
 commanding General.





By 1960, the recruit training core curriculum lengthened from 10 to 12 weeks and consisted of 5 basic phases:

1. Forming and processing
2. Basic training, classroom time and drill
3. Marksmanship
4. Mess and maintenance
5. Advanced training, combat training and inspection

*(Bayonet training pictured here, circa 1956)*

**PARRIS  
ISLAND**  
-  
**COLD WAR**

**1956**

8 April, Ribbon Creek training incident occurs.



**1956**

Drill instructors are issued the venerated field hat, popularly called the campaign cover.

**1958**

Confidence Course is constructed.





Barbed wire training 1950



Close order drill instruction circa 1963



Leisure time circa 1960

1959

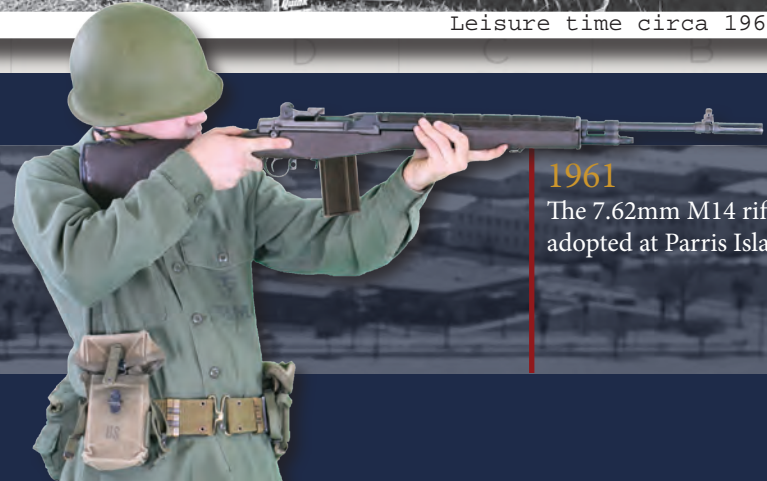
29 September, Hurricane Gracie moves across the depot.

1960

The 3rd Recruit Training begins moving into a new brick complex.

1961

The 7.62mm M14 rifle is adopted at Parris Island.







Ribbon Creek Service



1960

**BIG CHEVRONS FOR BIG JOB**—Master Sergeant Evelyn E. Albert, left, who became Sergeant Major of WM RTB Feb. 15, replacing MSgt. Vera Pinno, right, gains the distinction of being the first female Island authorized to wear

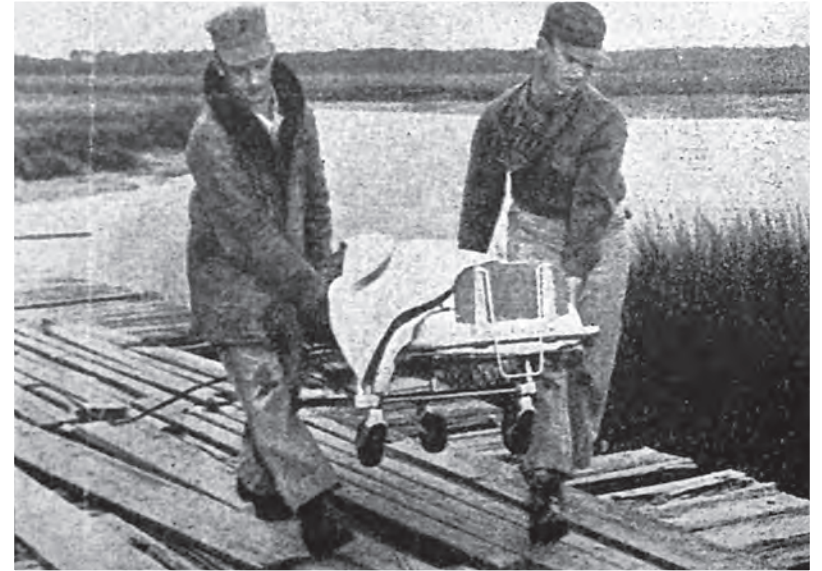


Platoon 71, Ribbon Creek



circa 1958





Ribbon Creek 1956



8 April 1956, a diver crawls out of Ribbon Creek during a recovery operation. Drill Instructor Staff Sergeant Matthew C. McKeon conducted a disciplinary march at night in a tidal basin named Ribbon Creek, which resulted in the drowning of six recruits.









During WWII the main gate was moved from Horse Island to its current location. A nearby guardhouse provided billeting for the Provost Marshall. Entrance way to Parris Island, 1963.



# Ribbon Creek

On Sunday, 8 April 1956, between 2000 and 2045, Drill Instructor Staff Sergeant Matthew C. McKeon, assigned to Platoon 71, "A" Company, 3d Recruit Training Battalion, marched 74 recruits from Platoon 71 into Ribbon Creek, a tidal stream, behind the modern day Weapons and Field Training Battalion rifle ranges at Parris Island. Several of the recruits got into depths over their heads, panic ensued, and six recruits drowned in the resulting confusion. Staff Sergeant McKeon later testified that the march was traditional, common and intended to develop discipline.

Parris Island's commanding general, Major General Joseph C. Burger, immediately convened a court of inquiry to investigate the circumstances. Evidence later presented in court showed that Staff Sergeant McKeon had graduated from the Drill Instructor's School and received the highest possible rating on "motivation," "emotional stability," and "hostility factors," and a better-than-average rating on "achievement." After also reviewing the recruit training directives and program, the court was of the opinion that the supervision and training program was adequate and that Staff Sergeant McKeon was solely to blame for "conducting an unauthorized and unnecessary march by night into an area of hazard." It recommended he be tried by general court-martial.

Commandant of the Marine Corps General Randolph McCall Pate felt that the Marine Corps itself was on trial in a moral sense for the death of the six recruits and believed that a reorganization of training procedures and supervisory methods at Parris Island was required. Thus, a separate recruit training command was established at Parris Island, to



Funeral service for the 6 recruits drowned from Platoon 71.

be commanded by a brigadier general selected by the commandant and who reported directly to his office on all matters. The recruit training command would be staffed with selected officers "to supervise and monitor but not to supplant the drill instructors" during recruit training.

On 16 July 1956, Staff Sergeant McKeon's court-martial trial began at the Depot Elementary School. It lasted for three weeks and, given the national attention it had gained, drew in many former Marines to testify about recruit training practices. Both the Commandant of the Marine Corps at that time and retired Lieutenant General Lewis B. Puller testified for the defense.

Finally, on 4 August 1956, the court handed down its decision: McKeon was acquitted of manslaughter and oppression of troops; he was found guilty of negligent homicide and drinking on duty. The sentence was a fine of \$270, nine months confinement of hard labor and a bad-conduct discharge. Upon review by the Secretary of the Navy, the sentence was reduced to three months hard labor and reduction to the rank of private; the discharge was set aside and the fine remitted.

In order to regain the confidence of the American public, all training was now closely supervised by a team of officers, tasked with identifying

ways to improve procedures and to provide the type of Marine recruit graduate desired by the Corps.

Drill instructors were more carefully selected, and three instructors were assigned to each recruit platoon instead of two. The campaign cover was issued in order to offer prestige and allow drill instructors to be easily distinguished from basic enlisted personnel. Drill instructors were also directed to use persuasion, psychology, and leadership as alternatives to pure aggression and authoritarian disciplinary measures. Unmarried drill instructor's quarters were moved from recruit area huts to Page Field, offering regular decompression periods from the demanding schedule. The Drill Instructor School also adopted the Drill Instructor's Creed.

A special training unit was established to develop recruits with specific problem areas: a conditioning platoon for overweight recruits, a motivation platoon for the recalcitrant, a proficiency platoon for the slow learners, a strength platoon for those requiring special exercises to build muscles, and a hospital platoon for those requiring medical attention and rehabilitation. These recruits could exist in these special training platoons until they could be reinserted into the regular training schedule, often with their original platoons, and successfully complete the training program.

The base was made available to the public for civilians and the press, so that citizens could see first-hand the legitimate process of making U.S. Marines. The graduation observance changed from a small, unit-based ceremony at a battalion area to the grand parade celebration that you see today.

*Rescue crew working in Ribbon Creek pictured right.*



