WHERE THE DIFFERENCE BEGINS...
Chapter 1

1883 - 1914

“The Marines have landed, situation well in hand.”
-Richard Harding Davis

Forged Through Victory

Parris Island ship dry dock pictured right 1895.

Parris Island

Purchased in 1715 by Alexander Parris, Parris Island overlooks Port Royal Sound, one of the best deep-water harbors along the eastern seaboard.

Parris Island's modern military era began early in the Civil War. In 1861, Union forces captured the harbor for use as headquarters for the Navy's South Atlantic Blockading Squadron and the Army's Department of the South. The area's strategic location allowed federal forces to strike at the Confederacy, and greatly contributed to final Union victory.

After the Civil War, a major commercial port developed. The port, together with a new railway connecting Port Royal and inland coal fields, enticed the Navy to establish a coaling station. Throughout the 1870s ships of the Atlantic Fleet were regularly anchored in the harbor.

An act of Congress, approved 7 August 1882, authorized the establishment and construction of a coaling dock and naval store house at Port Royal Harbor, SC, and appropriated $20,000 for that purpose. A board of naval officers appointed by the Secretary of the Navy selected Parris Island as the site.

By 1891, construction was in progress on a dry dock, employing a large number of laborers, "Very vicious characters from the cities in the vicinity," to protect the interests of the government, a Marine guard of one sergeant, two corporals, and ten privates was assigned to Port Royal. It was thus, that the first Marine post at Parris Island came into being on 26 June 1891.
The island’s potential drew South Carolina politicians to successfully lobby for a permanent military installation. A portion of Parris Island was purchased in 1881 for a naval station. (Aerial view pictured here.) By 1891 Marines were assigned here, and in 1915 the island was permanently turned over to the Marine Corps.
1893 Wooden barracks constructed.

1896 Detachment formally designated “Marine Barracks, U. S. Naval Station, Port Royal, South Carolina.”

1909 The Corps transfers an officers’ school to Parris Island.

1911 A recruit depot is established. The Navy also opens a disciplinary barracks, which is operated by Marines.
On 29 August 1895, the 2,800 ton monitor Amphitrite became the first ship to enter the dock. As a test, the ship initially entered bow first, then came in a second time by the stern.
Overview of Quarters one (left) and Dry Dock construction, circa 1895.
On 1 January 1909, the Marine Officers School was first established at the U.S. Naval Station, Port Royal, South Carolina. Lieutenant Colonel Eli K. Cole (pictured right) arrived to take command from First Lieutenant Clarence L.A. Ingate, who was currently acting as the existing detachment commander for the Marine Barracks in place. Organized for the purpose of indoctrinating newly commissioned officers, the school graduated 27 Marine officers that December and 16 more in December 1910.

Many notable and historic Marines attended the Marine Officers School during this time, to include, Alexander Archer Vandegrift, who was later awarded the medal of honor, became the first Marine 4-star general and eventually served as the 18th Commandant of the Marine Corps; Alfred Austell Cunningham, who attained the rank of lieutenant colonel, became the first Marine Corps aviator and the first Director, Marine Corps Aviation; and Lieutenant General Roy Geiger, who, during World War II, became the first Marine to lead a field Army into battle.

On 1 June 1911, the recruit depot began operations, processing newly enlisted recruits on a three-company basis, as a subordinate activity of the Marine Officers School currently in place. Shortly thereafter, the Navy Department decided to use its property at Port Royal for a disciplinary installation. On 28 August 1911, by General Order No. 122, it changed the designation of the U. S. Naval Station, Port Royal, to the U. S. Naval Disciplinary Barracks, Port Royal, South Carolina. Two days later the Marine Corps turned over its buildings there to the Navy and transferred its activities. The Marine Officers School, including two companies of the recruit depot, went to Norfolk; the remaining company of recruits continued training at Charleston, where a one-company recruit depot was operated from this time until June 1912.

Later in October of 1915, the recruit depot operations were moved from the Marine Officers School at Norfolk, back to Port Royal, where, on 25 October 1915, it was established as Marine Barracks, Port Royal, South Carolina. The Marine Officers School remained in place at Norfolk, Virginia, until July of 1917, when it was later consolidated and relocated to Quantico, Virginia, where it remains today.