1915 - 1921

“Come on you sons of bitches! Do you want to live forever?”
- Gunnery Sergeant Dan Daly

CHAPTER | TWO
PREPARING FOR WAR

By 1914, the world was in crisis. War had broken out in Europe, and closer to home, Marines saw action at Vera Cruz and Haiti. As a response to the impending peril, in October 1915, Parris Island’s naval facilities were turned over to the Marine Corps for recruit training. The installation was officially designated “Marine Barracks, Port Royal, SC.”

With the passing of the National Defense Act in 1916, recruiting efforts were amplified. Included in this act was the creation of the Marine Corps Reserve. The depot quickly grew to meet the challenges of an expanding role in preparing the nation for war. After 1915, most recruits received training at Parris Island or Mare Island, California. During World War I, about 80% of all recruits trained at Parris Island. West coast training was expanded in 1923 by moving Mare Island’s operations to San Diego.

The course of instruction at Parris Island lasted eight weeks. The first three weeks were devoted to instruction and practice of close order drill, physical exercise, swimming, bayonet fighting, personal combat, wall scaling, and rope climbing. During the fourth and fifth weeks, recruits perfected their drills, learned boxing and wrestling, and were taught interior guard duties. The last three weeks were dedicated to marksmanship.

Parris Island also hosted a variety of other skill-based schools including noncommissioned officer, field music, radio, signal, clerical, pay, and cooks’ and bakers’ schools. On 1 July 1918, a Presidential proclamation ordered possession to be taken of the entire island not already owned by the United States Government, comprising 6,000 total acres.
Prior to 1928, boats were the only method used to transport the increasing number of new recruits to Parris Island. (pictured here)

Recruiting standards required all applicants to be unmarried, English educated, male citizens, with no dependents and of good health, strong constitution and ‘sound as to senses and limbs.’

All new arriving recruits were processed by marching through the post, to the quarantine station for evaluation before finally taking the oath of enlistment.

**MARINE BARRACKS PARIS ISLAND**

**1915**
October 1915, Parris Island’s naval facilities are turned over to the Marine Corps and a recruit training depot was re-established.

**1915**
Recruits begin training with the Springfield 03 rifle.

**1917**
22 June, the post is renamed “Marine Barracks, Paris Island” using a single “r.”
1917  
6 April, the U. S. declares war on Germany. Paris Island has 835 recruits in training.

1918  
11 November, World War I ends. By the war's end 46,202 recruits are transformed into new Marines on Paris Island.

1919  
3 May, the official spelling is changed to “Marine Barracks, Parris Island,” to match the island's namesake, Alexander Parris.
Recruits practice slow fire at 600 yards with sand-bag rests. Notice the Eagle, Globe and Anchor on the instructor’s unusual headgear. Rifle Range, circa 1918.
On 28 October 1915, the Navy officially transferred the land and buildings of then existing Port Royal Naval Station to the Marine Corps, thus establishing Headquarters Detachment, Marine Barracks, Port Royal. Training of Marine recruits became the principal mission and an expansion of the installation became necessary.

With a heavy influx of recruits, the volume of recruit mail also increased. Marine Corps Order No. 27, dated 22 June 1917, reads “At the request of the Postmaster General and in order to avoid delay in the delivery of mail, it is directed that the official designation of the Marine Corps post at Port Royal, S. C., be changed from Marine Barracks, “Port Royal,” S. C., to Marine Barracks, “Paris Island”, S. C. Mail intended for this post will be addressed accordingly.” The spelling of “Paris” with one “r” was the official version until the spelling with two “r’s” was directed by Marine Corps Order No. 32, dated 3 May 1919.

Before the war, Parris Island consisted of 78 acres, of which 58 acres were firm ground and the remainder was made up of marsh wetlands. On 7 August 1918, a Presidential proclamation ordered possession to be taken of the entire island not already owned by the United States. After the war, the settlement of claims for reimbursement took many years to complete.

The following official description of the island is quoted from the Presidential proclamation: “All that certain tract of land, situate, lying and being in Beaufort County, State of South Carolina, known as “Parris Island or Paris Island,” being all that tract of land shown on U.S.C. and G. S. chart no. 571, lying south of Archer’s Creek as said creek is shown on said chart, and being bounded on the east by waters of the Beaufort River and on the south and west by waters of Port Royal Sound and Broad River, containing in all 6,000 acres, more or less, of fast land and marsh land...”

In 1917, the Bureau of Yards and Docks described the 6,000 acres as consisting of “3,000 acres high and 3,000 acres marsh.” On 21 April 1917, the Bureau of Yards and Docks awarded a contract for the construction of 233 temporary buildings, providing accommodations for 2,000 men. By the end of 1918, an additional 288 buildings were constructed, providing quarters for 4,100 men, officers’ quarters, piers, and additional necessary structures to support recruit training.

Due to the high salt content of the surrounding bodies of water, Beaufort and Broad rivers, having a fresh supply of drinking water readily available posed quite an extensive logistical problem. (map pictured right) The salt water wells were reserved for washing stations and bathing, where the fresh drinking water had to be regularly shipped in by boat. Shortly after, a submerged pipe line between Parris Island and Port Royal Island, near the northern boundary, was laid in order to provide a continued source of fresh drinking water.

Additional support services began to develop aboard the island, primarily from the YMCA and the Knights of Columbus. The YMCA opened its first hut on Parris Island on 10 July 1917, and provided recruits and permanent personnel with a religious, educational, entertainment, athletics, and a locally published newsletter called “The Marine.” The Knights of Columbus opened a year later, offering stationery, books, magazines, newspapers, staged shows, phonographs and exhibited movies and candy for recreation. Training areas were continually developing and changing. By 1924, Parris Island had several rifle ranges, physical training courses, a brig and fully functioning air field.