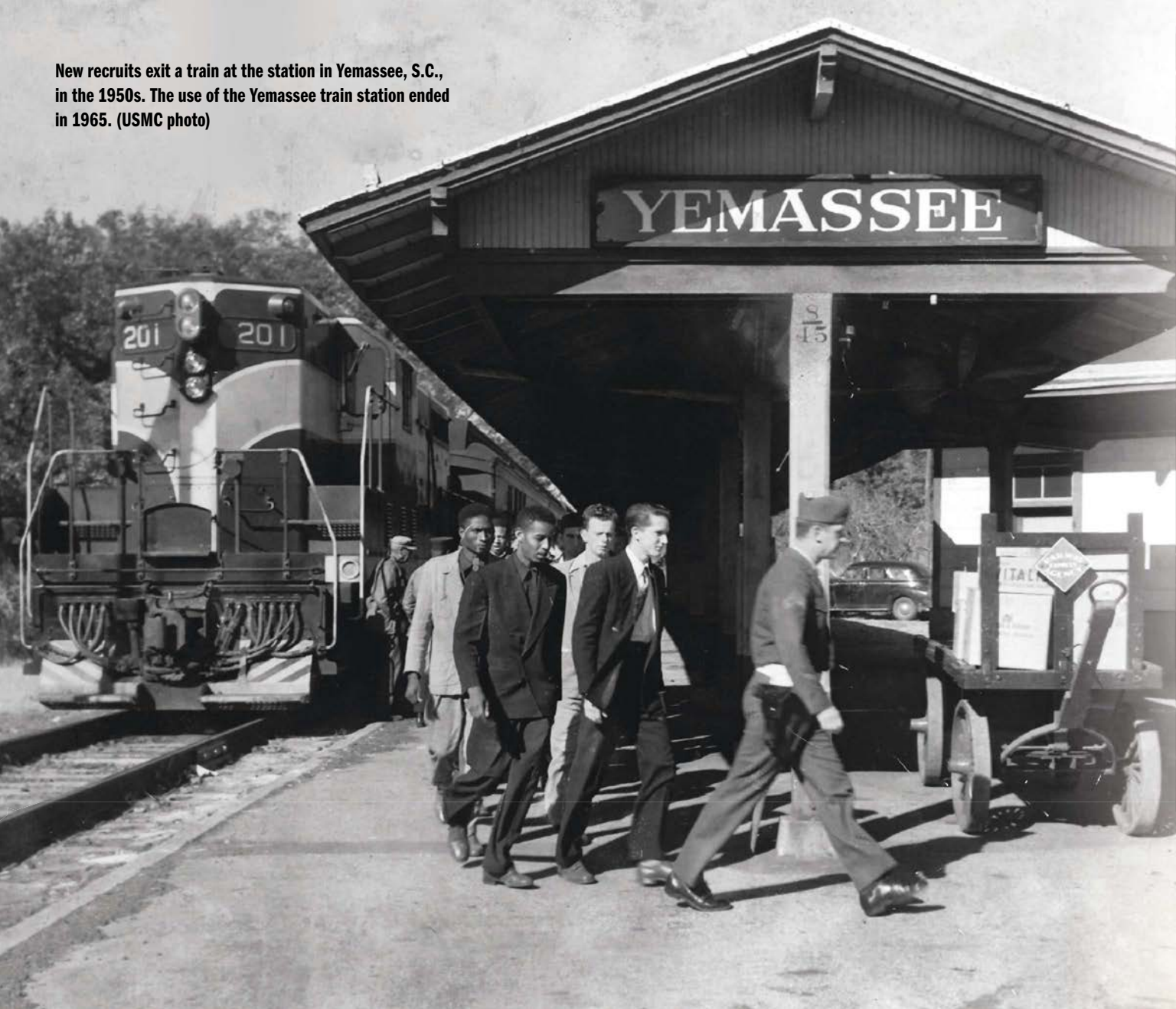


New recruits exit a train at the station in Yemassee, S.C., in the 1950s. The use of the Yemassee train station ended in 1965. (USMC photo)



Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C., Celebrates “100 Years of Making Marines”

By CWO-4 Randy Gaddo, USMC (Ret)

The buildings have morphed over the years—from tents to Quonset huts, to modern brick barracks and stately historical landmarks—but Parris Island has remained a constant for Marines.

Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) Parris Island, S.C., is the oldest major base in the Marine Corps, and it marks “100 Years of Making Marines” this year. With that as the official theme, the base staff has been featuring special events throughout the year to commemorate the milestone.

In April, the Parris Island Historical

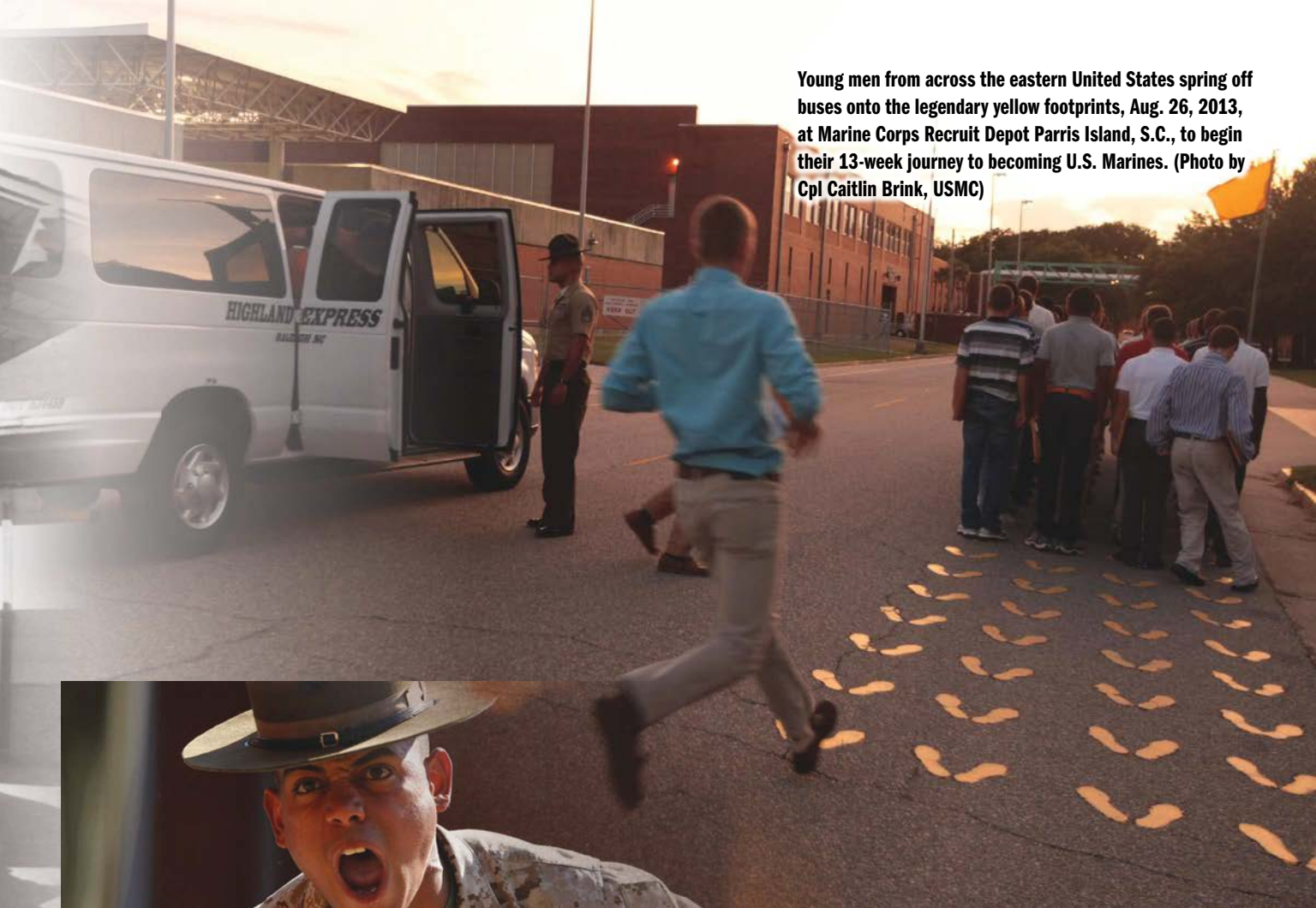
and Museum Society hosted “Celebrating History, Preserving Resources, Sustaining Our Future” in conjunction with Earth Day. In addition to the annual 15-mile “Iron Mike Bike Ride Through History,” there was a nature walk, a 5-kilometer family walk and a 5-kilometer fun run. All events began at the Charlesfort-Santa Elena National Historic Landmark located on The Legends at Parris Island golf course.

In May there was a “Centennial 100K Relay Race” featuring 6- to 12-person teams each running 5 miles. Several golf tournaments themed around the centennial were held in following months, and the

100-year anniversary was promoted at local events such as the annual Beaufort Water Festival in July and the Shrimp Festival in September.

The culminating events in celebration of the depot’s centennial are scheduled for Friday, Oct. 16, starting with morning colors and a recruit graduation ceremony, followed by guest speakers outlining the history of Parris Island, and ending with a Sunset Parade performed by Marines from Marine Barracks Washington, “8th and I.”

The premiere of a documentary film made about the depot will be held the evening of Oct. 15.



Young men from across the eastern United States spring off buses onto the legendary yellow footprints, Aug. 26, 2013, at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C., to begin their 13-week journey to becoming U.S. Marines. (Photo by Cpl Caitlin Brink, USMC)



Left: Each year, approximately 600 DIs train the more than 20,000 recruits at MCRD Parris Island. The famous symbol of the Marine Corps DI, the campaign cover or Smokey the Bear hat, was introduced in 1956.

Below: Recruits from Co N, 4th Recruit Training Bn attempt the “run-jump-swing” on the confidence course, Parris Island, S.C., Oct. 3, 2012.

USMC

Oct. 25th is significant because on that date in 1915 the recruit depot separated from the officer’s school and was established as Marine Barracks, Port Royal, S.C., with the mission of training enlisted Marine recruits. However, Nov. 1 is recognized as the official milestone when the Navy turned over the land and buildings to the Marine Corps.

Groundbreaking for the mirror-image MCRD in San Diego started in 1919. Recruit training started there in 1923, when that function was relocated from Mare Island Naval Shipyard in Vallejo, Calif.

When you look at Parris Island from a satellite-map view, it’s easy to see why it



CPL MARIANNA HILL - USMC

is a desirable place to focus the attention of new recruits enduring the most demanding physical and psychological test of their lives.

It is an island, about 4 miles long and 3 miles wide totaling more than 8,000 acres, with only about 3,200 acres on dry land. At 21 feet above sea level, it is surrounded by dozens of other islands in what is called the Low Country of South Carolina.

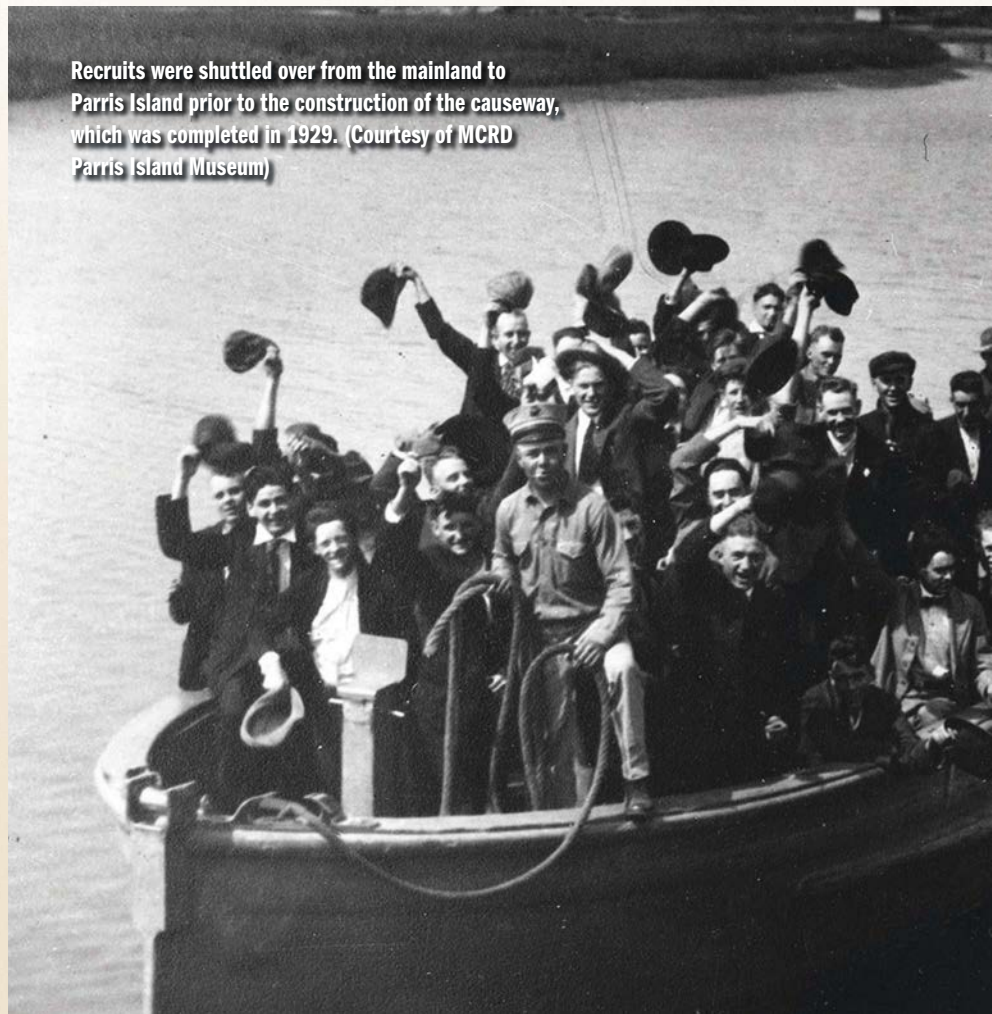
The Low Country features tidal salt marshes that are deceptively beautiful with their rattling palmetto trees, graceful Spanish moss flowing from live oaks, colorful aquatic grasses and pristine water at high tide.

However, come low tide, the beauty exposes her beastly face; pluff mud—the slippery, shiny, brownish-gray mud of the tidal marshes is fabled for its suction power. One step can pull a person in to his or her ankles, or knees, or even hips. There is a saying that there's only one way onto Parris Island, and the only way off is successful graduation from recruit training. Both are true.

The only way onto the island is a two-lane, 3-mile causeway built across the tidal marshes. The tidal marsh mud flats stretch as far as a new recruit's eyes can see on both sides of the causeway; most recruits don't notice the flats since they generally are brought in during the middle of the night. Escape from the island would mean risking death by pluff mud, or the gators that live there, or the sharks that patrol surrounding waters.

Veteran Marine and historian Eugene Alvarez, Ph.D. chronicled this planned isolation in his book, "Parris Island: 'The Cradle of the Corps,' A History of the United States Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina, 1562-2002." A copy of the Korean War

Recruits were shuttled over from the mainland to Parris Island prior to the construction of the causeway, which was completed in 1929. (Courtesy of MCRD Parris Island Museum)



veteran's manuscript is at the Parris Island Museum.

In the 300-page tome, Alvarez notes: "Another training advantage was Parris Island's geographic and social isolation, which separated it from the distractions normally found in Navy yards. Published articles were quick to report there were

fewer allurements at Parris Island to divert a recruit's attention from his work, and that recruits who were placed in barracks would be directly under the observation of an instructor who could teach and discipline them systematically at all times."

Alvarez also writes that quarantining new arrivals in the early years of the base

Recruits prepare to step through the doors of the receiving building, Aug. 26, 2013, as they begin the transition from civilians to Marines at MCRD Parris Island, S.C. (Photo by Cpl Caitlin Brink, USMC)





CPL. CAITLIN BRINK, USMC

Above right: New recruits from Co K, 3d Recruit Training Bn prepare to make a quick, pre-scripted phone call shortly after arriving on Parris Island, S.C., Aug. 26, 2013. The intent of the phone calls is to ensure the recruits' families are notified of their safe arrival.

Right: Sgt Antwan Jones, a DI with Co B, 1st Recruit Training Bn, marches with his platoon during their initial drill evaluation on Parris Island, Oct. 8, 2012.



LCP. MICHAEL ROGERS, USMC

was not difficult because the base could only be reached by boat. A ferry provided all transportation from the Port Royal docks to the Parris Island docks.

Modern Marines have taken for granted the palmetto-lined causeway they drive across each time they enter or leave the base. But that land approach didn't come into existence until 1929 when the causeway and bridge over Archer's Creek were built, ending an era of water transportation to the island.

The initial entry point for arriving recruits has changed over the years. Today, most recruits fly into nearby airports and are bused to Parris Island. However, from 1915 until 1965, the train

station at Yemassee, S.C., was their first stop in the Low Country.

"I remember the chaos, the screaming and the doe-eyed look on every recruit's face as orders were being yelled out by the young [noncommissioned officers] waiting for us at the station," said Vietnam-era veteran Marine Mark Figroul in an interview with Corporal Brendan Roethel last October. Serving from 1964 to 1966, Figroul noted: "This was my first true glimpse of the Corps. This is where it all began for myself and many others."

So special was the Yemassee experience that the town formed the Yemassee Historical Association hoping to restore the historic train station and barracks

where Marines worked and lived. The association plans to make the barracks a museum and keep the history of Yemassee alive. In 2013, they began an annual Yemassee Train Depot Reunion in October, drawing Marines, veterans and families from past and present.

Retired Master Gunnery Sergeant George Hajar remembers arriving at the Yemassee train station in 1961 at 6:30 a.m. "They got us off at the train station and took us to a restaurant for a breakfast of scrambled eggs, bacon and grits," recalled the Wilmington, Del., native. "I didn't even know what grits were, but I ate them. Then they put us on a bus for Parris Island. At the gate they stopped



and a drill instructor got on. He didn't say anything; he just glared at us."

Hijar remembers transiting the causeway and getting off the bus, but noted that there were no yellow footprints in place as there are today. The imprints in platoon formation with heels touching and feet at a 45-degree angle now mark the legendary place where new recruits get off the bus.

According to the MCRD Parris Island Centennial Celebration website (www.mcrdpi.marines.mil/CentennialCelebration/100factsaboutParrisIsland.aspx), the yellow footprints didn't come into existence until January 1965 when recruit receiving moved from Headquarters and Service Battalion to a new location near the Recruit Training Regiment headquarters. "To this day, upon a recruit's arrival to Parris Island, they are ordered off of their bus, or van, and instructed to stand on the yellow footprints, where they get their first taste of recruit training with a speech from a receiving drill instructor," notes the website.

Although "making Marines" has been

the primary duty aboard Parris Island for 100 years, Marines have been tied to Parris Island long before they took it over in 1915.

On Nov. 2, 1861, the first Marines arrived to the area via Port Royal Harbor to serve aboard various Union blockading ships, according to historical material on the base website. They served there with the Union Navy throughout the Civil War. In 1891, a Marine guard detachment of one sergeant, two corporals and 10 privates established the first Marine post on the island in order to protect the construction of a coal dock and naval storehouse at Port Royal Harbor.

By 1895, the first officer in charge, 1stLt Clarence L.A. Ingate, was assigned. Shortly thereafter, in 1909, the detachment was upgraded to a Marine Barracks with a mission to indoctrinate newly commissioned officers.

In 1911, a three-company recruit depot began operations as a secondary function of the Marine Officers' School. However, both operations were transferred to

Opposite page: SSgt Chambers, senior drill instructor, "Papa" Co, 4th Recruit Training Bn, performs an incentive training session with her recruits aboard MCRD Parris Island, S.C., March 14, 2015. IT sessions are held by the DIs in order to instill discipline into the recruits.

Norfolk, Va., between 1911 and 1915 when the Navy decided to use Port Royal as a disciplinary installation. But in October 1915, Marines from the officers' school returned to the island to assume what would become its 100-years-and-counting mission of training young men and women to be United States Marines.

Parris Island has been home to many firsts and distinctions, one of the most important being that it is the only place in the world where women are trained to be enlisted United States Marines.

On Nov. 5, 1943, female officers arrived from Camp Lejeune, N.C., to inspect facilities for the first enlisted women reserve unit. As early as September 1945, the Women Reserve Battalion was listed on Parris Island's organizational charts,



BGen Lori Reynolds (front, second from left) leads recruits on their “motivational run” in December 2011. BGen Reynolds was the first female Marine to command MCRD Parris Island. (Photo by CWO-4 Randy Gaddo, USMC (Ret))

according to “A Brief History of the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina,” written in 1962 by Elmore A. Champie.

The only female Marine to command MCRD Parris Island is Brigadier General Loretta E. Reynolds, who served from 2011 to 2014 as both the depot commanding general and the commander of the Eastern Recruiting Region, responsible for finding young men and women east of the Mississippi River who have the mettle to be Marines. The CG of MCRD San Diego does the same west of the river.

“One of my favorite parts of the job has been going out to the recruiting stations to talk with recruiters and some of the young men and women who have not yet shipped to Parris Island,” BGen Reynolds said last year as she prepared to leave for a new assignment at the Pentagon.

“It is amazing what our recruiters and drill instructors can do with somebody who has the heart to be a Marine,” she declared. “The recruits certainly have to be physically fit and smart because our

standards are very high, but what our recruiters often find are young men and women who had never considered the Marine Corps before because they didn’t think they were good enough.”

Even the name of the base itself has changed during its history; there was a brief time when “Parris” was spelled “Paris.”

The land upon which the recruit depot stands was once owned by English Colonel Alexander Parris, who purchased the island in 1715 after it had been home to French and Spanish colonies. He and his son-in-law started cultivating the island, with indigo being their first cash crop, followed by cotton. By the 1850s, the island supported seven plantations.

So Parris with two r’s was the proper spelling. World War I demanded massive expansion of installations at Parris Island to accommodate the larger number of recruits and the type of training required. During that time, Marine Barracks Port Royal was re-designated Marine Barracks Parris Island. However, due to the swelling volume of mail being received as the base built up for WW I, confusion occurred with mail being sent to Port Royal instead of Parris Island, according to Champie.

Marine Corps Order Number 27 was written in June 1917, which read, “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.” Predictably, this “one r” spelling caused confusion and consternation as it was distributed throughout the Corps. That spelling was used until a rescinding order in 1919 corrected the mistake.

Building upon the history made there for the past 100 years, today a sign hangs boldly across the Boulevard de France, the main road on Parris Island. It spells out, simply, “We Make Marines,” succinctly encapsulating a century of changes all aimed at the same goal, taking young men and women and making them into United States Marines.

Author’s bio: CWO-4 Randy Gaddo, USMC (Ret) was a combat correspondent as an enlisted Marine and later a public affairs officer. He retired from active duty in 1996 and now operates his own writing-based business, RGCommunications, and is a freelance photojournalist.



CPL ALLISON LOTZ, USMC