

Marines Of Building 58

Story by Tom Bartlett

Photos courtesy of Jack Cataneo

“Once a Marine, always a Marine!” “First to fight!” “Retreat, Hell!” “Squeegee the parade deck!” “Clean the snow!” “Paint the grass!”

Slogans, mottos and gung ho phrases have become motivating factors in the lives of Marines. Some work; others *mean* work.

“I remember when we were ordered to go to Quantico (Va.) to load up a six-by truck full of clean snow,” former Marine Joe Cirrincione said. “The snow around the Commandant’s house was getting dirty. It didn’t look good, and the Commandant had a visiting dignitary coming for a visit. So it was decided that we’d clean up the snow for show.”

“The Marine Barracks at 8th and I in Washington, D.C., was known as a show place,” continued Gary Wait. “One summer, it was very dry, and the grass on the place began turning brown. The Commandant was hosting a visiting political figure, and we were told to spray green paint over the lawn, making it appear that we had a full, plush and very green expanse of lawn!”

“I remember that,” said former Marine Steve Holton. “And I also remember that following a very heavy rain, there was standing water on the parade deck, and it was Friday. We were all ordered to get squeegees and to scrape all the water off prior

to the Friday Evening Parade.”

“We were pretty sneaky, back then,” Gary Wait added. “We’d cut our operating rod spring (in the rifles) making it shorter, or we’d loosen the butt plate, so our weapons would ‘POP!’ as we executed the manual of arms during our drills.”

“I recall one time when we were performing,” Cirrincione said with a laugh. “The Barracks’ mascot was out on the parade deck, and the platoon sergeant yelled the preparatory command, ‘Right shoulder. . .’ and that damn dog barked. Some thought the platoon sergeant had yelled, ‘Arms!’ and some recognized it for what it was, a dog’s ‘Ari!’ Meantime, half the platoon is going to right shoulder, and the remainder of the platoon is standing fast.”

Memories. . . some good, some bad, some hysterical, others sad.

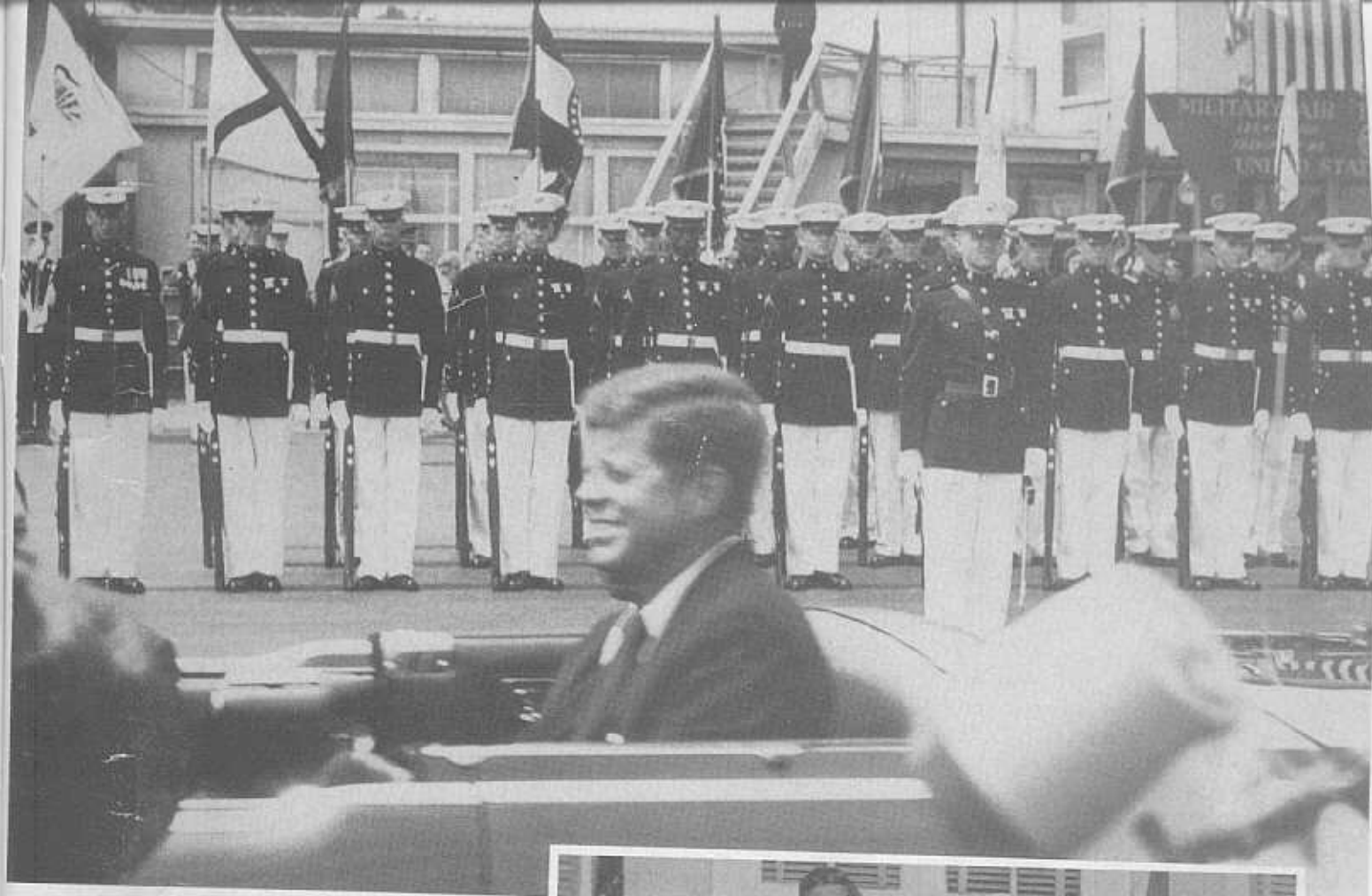
Former members of the Ceremonial Guard Company of Marine Barracks 8th and I held a reunion, during which, officers and enlisted Marines who were stationed at Building 58 between 1957 and 1977 met as a group for the first time.

“We formed an association,” Jack Cataneo said, “and we call it, ‘The Marines of Building 58.’ We’re more

Building 58 in the U.S. Navy Yard, Washington, D.C.

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(OPPOSITE PAGE) The Ceremonial Guard Company, from Marine Barracks 8th and I, is best known for the Silent Drill Platoon and the U.S. Marine Corps Color Guard. (ABOVE) The Marines of Building 58 rendered honors to President John F. Kennedy in May 1962. (RIGHT) President Kennedy with General David M. Shoup, Commandant of the Marine Corps, before a Friday Evening Parade at the Marine Barracks. The Marines holding flags were with the Ceremonial Guard Company.

than an organization of anonymous members and a post office box. And, more importantly, we are an organization with a heart."

Cataneo, considered the "founder" of the reunion because it was his idea, boasted that the Ceremonial Guard Company was acknowledged as the sharpest and most elite military unit of its kind in the world.

"Each man was hand-picked and held a Top Secret White House clearance," he recalled.

"Aside from numerous ceremonial duties, we also provided security at Camp David (Md.) and other sites for Presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford.

"When Southeast Asia became a battlefield, the men of the Ceremonial Guard Company were called to fight in Vietnam," Cataneo continued. "Major Charles E. Finney, who was a lance corporal when assigned to the Silent Drill Team, is still considered missing in action.

"Additionally, 10 others from the Building 58 Ceremonial Guard were KIA (killed in action) in Vietnam. They were Sergeant Paul Hamilton Jr., Corporal Edgar D. Burchell, Cpl David Alan Siemon, Lieutenant Bruce H. Eaton, Cpl James P. Proctor, Lieutenant Colonel Richard L. Hatch, Cpl Arthur Davis, Sgt David F. Langley, Cpl Franklin I. Burris Jr., and Cpl Major Morgan."

The Ceremonial Guard Company

members performed with the Silent Drill Team, as members of the United States Marine Corps Color Guard, and as members of the drill platoons. Last year, the Marines of Building 58 who served from 1963 to 1968 held a reunion. Later, the Marines who served from 1957 to 1963 held a reunion.

Each group was unaware of the other group's reunion until a notice published in *Leatherneck* magazine sparked the idea of a joint reunion and possibly forming an association.

"Each time we meet, we are joined by others of our past—Marines of the four marching platoons, or body bearers (funeral details), or former members of the Navy Yard guard



BUILDING 58 (cont.)

section. Collectively, we were the Presidential Honor Guard, representing the Marine Corps," Cataneo said.

Cataneo, a former lance corporal in the second platoon and also a member of the body bearers, founded his reunion group in 1963. Steve Holton and Gary Wait, both of the first platoon, scheduled a reunion for their old comrades.

"Since the merger of the two groups, our association is up to more than 400 members," Cataneo said.

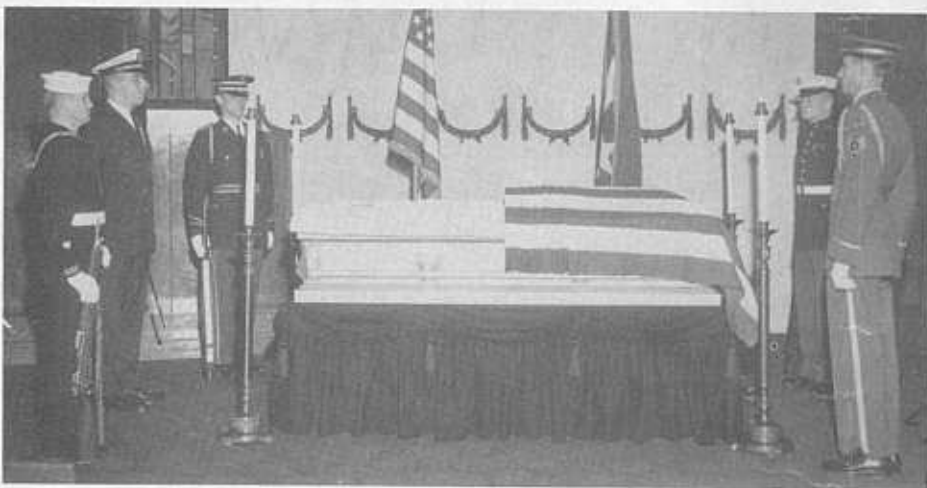
Building 58, located at the Washington (D.C.) Navy Yard is presently "home" for the Marine Corps Historical Center and Marine Corps Museum. Prior to 1814, it was known as the "Old Stores Building," where canvas, twine, rope, navigational equipment, tools, oil and paint were issued.

During August 1814, when Major General Robert Ross and his British Redcoats marched into Washington demanding the surrender of the Capital, the Navy Yard commander (Capt Thomas Tingey) set a torch to the "Old Stores Building."

The British did likewise to the Capitol, White House, Treasury, War Office and the Library of Congress. Surprisingly, the Marine Barracks and the Commandant's house were spared.

The "Old Stores Building" was reconstructed, and during the 1920s, it housed the Yard's public works and personnel offices. It was remodeled as a Marine barracks in 1941.

"We referred to it simply as 'Building 58,'" Cataneo recalled. "We had three decks and a basement. There were squadbays for the four platoons and the Navy Yard guard sec-



(TOP) Marines of Building 58 provided security for President Dwight D. Eisenhower and his wife, "Mamie," seated in the center, at the isolated Camp David, Md., retreat. (ABOVE) Members of the Ceremonial Guard Company serve as Body Bearers and also maintain a watch on military and political dignitaries lying in state. (BELOW) Captain Richard Hatch, a former commander of the Ceremonial Guard Company, received a piece of cake during his "Sayonara" party in 1960. Hatch was KIA in Vietnam in 1968.



Belongs to Joe Larkin

tion. The Color Guard and body bearers shared a large room. Staff NCOs each had a room, and there were separate areas for NCOs, and an officer for each platoon leader.

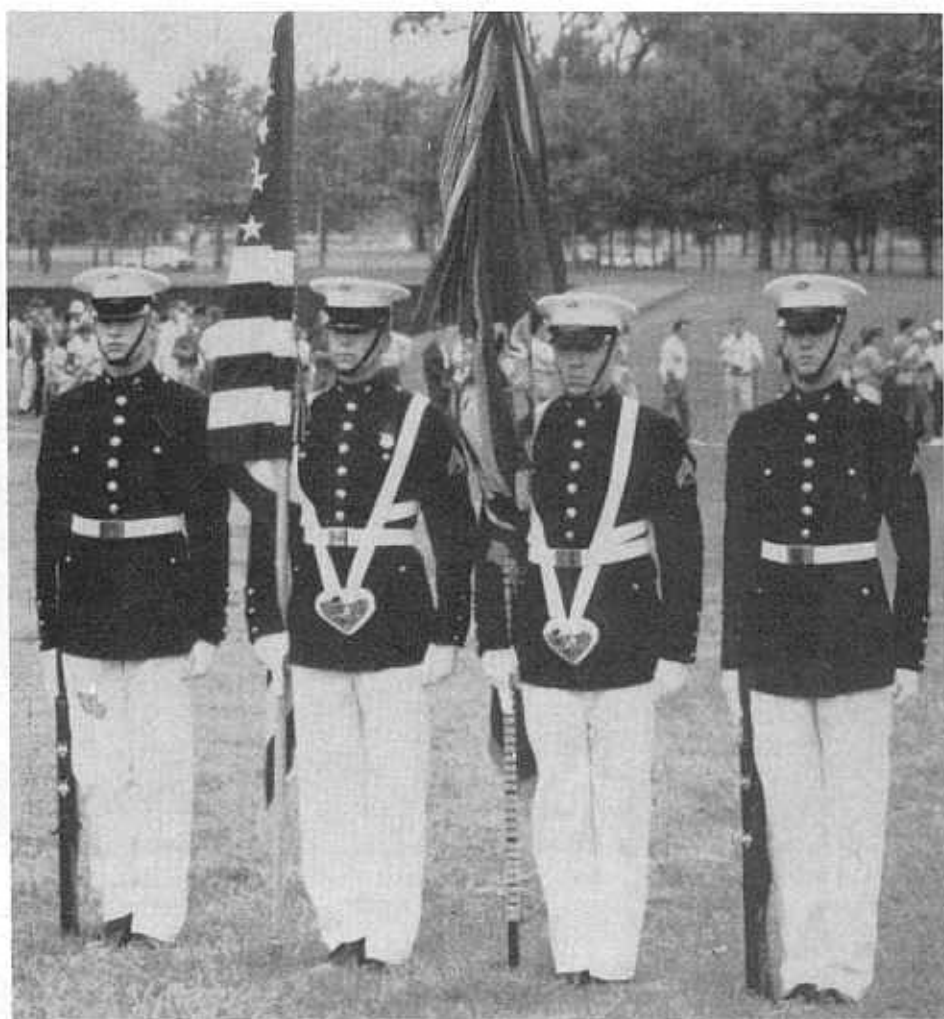
"Naturally, there was a messhall, post exchange, barber shop, TV and recreation room with a pool table, a supply shack and a slop chute (beer garden). We had our own steam/press shop, a weight room, bowling alley, room for washing machines and dryers, and a police sergeant's shack."

Ceremonial duties included the famous Friday Evening Parades and Sunset Parades (Tuesday evenings), as well as joint service wreath layings at the Tomb of the Unknowns, joint service funerals, and numerous parades and arrival/departure ceremonies for foreign heads of state.

The Silent Drill Team and Marine Corps Color Guard performed at Marine Corps division reunions, during football half-time shows, and on TV, such as "The Ed Sullivan Show."

"We were also called upon to participate in what we called 'a death watch' detail in the Rotunda for American dignitaries," Cataneo recalled, "as well as providing an honor guard for fallen Marines interred at Arlington or other cemeteries."

At various times, the Marines were also called upon to provide security during summit conferences at Camp David, Blair House in Washington, or the "Summer White House." Twice each year, the Marines of the



The United States Marine Corps Color Guard.

Ceremonial Guard were required to qualify with the rifle and pistol at Quantico, Va.

"But it wasn't *all* work," Cataneo explained. "The ratio of women to men in the Washington area was 8-to-1, and Marines on liberty in their dress blue uniforms didn't have problems finding dates...."

For additional information

cerning the "Building 58 Association," contact Jack Cataneo, 37 Franklin Place, Staten Island, NY 10314; Steve Holton, Rt. 1, Box 156B, Indian Head, MD 20640; Joe Cirrincione, 2529 E. 14th St., Brooklyn, NY 11235; or Gary Wait, 15 Beechwood Dr., Waldorf, MD 20601.



The Marine Ceremonial Guard Company's 1987 reunion at Marine Barracks 8th and I.

