

It Starts at Parris Island and Lasts Forever - -

I recently attended a mini-reunion of Marine Barracks Washington, D.C., Marines at Parris Island, S.C., where I went to boot camp. Forty-four years went very fast, and this was my first opportunity to visit the depot. The staff members went out of their way to accommodate us with transportation and Marines to guide us around. We were special guests at the Friday Morning Colors Ceremony and then attended the graduation parade. From there, we were treated to lunch at the rifle range and visited the museum and Post Exchange. The second day we also had transportation and a more extensive tour of the base.

After the tour, I had a chance to visit the parade deck at 3d Recruit Training Battalion and watch current privates at drill. I had my platoon book with me and was able to look at the background of the pictures taken during February, March and April, 1962. Much to my surprise the building and grounds are the same as when I was a private. With all the memories and visions of 1962, I was reminded how much the Marine Corps means to me, and what a big part of me came out on that parade deck.

I was assigned to MB Washington and by October I was assigned to security at Camp David, Md., and was part of the Marine Corps Color Guard. I was getting to see President John F. Kennedy occasionally, and in February 1963, I stood guard on the Mona Lisa at the National Gallery of Art. In March 1963, I was part of a detail that guarded President Kennedy during his visit to San Jose, Costa Rica. Of course, we all had a visible part in the funeral of the President after he was assassinated.

In December 1963, I was assigned to the White House Color Guard and did several events, standing beside President Lyndon B. Johnson while he talked with his guests. The Camp David guard duty continued when the President was there.

When my tour of duty was over, I went to Camp Pendleton, Calif., and shortly thereafter on to Vietnam. That was one of the most memorable experiences of my life. After the Corps, I went to college, got a great job and raised a family. I am now retired very comfortably in Oceanside, Calif.

I can say that a lot of what I am today and have been was a credit to the Marine Corps. All of it started at 3d Battalion on Parris Island. I was at a bar one Sunday afternoon in Lakeside, Calif., when a Marine at the bar turned, held up his beer and proclaimed, "I feel sorry for any young man who never took the opportunity to be a United States Marine." I couldn't agree more.

Thank you, United States Marine Corps!

Sgt Robert F. Neal 1962-66
Oceanside, Calif.