

# MARINE CORPS BASE CAMP LEJEUNE DURING THE KOREAN WAR

At the end of World War II the Allies agreed to establish a four-power trusteeship for the peninsula nation of Korea, which, until that time, had been under the control of Japan. This decision, reached at the Yalta conference in 1945, resulted in the establishment of two different Korean governments: the Republic of Korea (ROK), the democratic nation of South Korea, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Communist North Korea. The 38th parallel was defined as the boundary between the two nations. By early 1949 North Korea had obtained a massive amount of weaponry from the Soviet Union and Communist China, and was poised to invade the non-Communist south.

Although Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union were increasing, the Truman administration did not anticipate another major military conflict any time soon after the end of World War II. For that reason, the administration's policy was to downsize the military from 1945 to 1950. In a January 1950 policy statement, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson declared that Korea was outside the United States line of defense. This statement emboldened the North Koreans, who, in the predawn hours of Sunday, 25 June 1950, crossed the 38th parallel into South Korea. Although caught off-guard and unprepared by the invasion, the United States quickly reversed its position and committed forces in support of South Korea. On 26 June President Truman ordered the use of U.S. planes and naval vessels against North Korean forces, and on 30 June U.S. ground troops were deployed. The United Nations Security Council created a United Nations Command (UNC) in support of South Korea, which was the first collective action engaged in by that organization. On the opposite side, Soviet and Chinese troops and pilots helped to bolster the North Korean forces.

General Douglas MacArthur, the senior American commander and soon designated Commander of the UNC, watched the ROK resistance disintegrate and on 2 July 1950 requested a Marine Brigade complete with air support. The 1st Provisional Marine Brigade was consequently formed and departed for the Far East beginning 10 July. At Marine Corps prompting, MacArthur then made three requests for the 1st MarDiv, which would conduct the amphibious masterstroke at the western port town of Inchon on 15 September. This landing and the simultaneous advance of the UNC forces defending the Pusan perimeter shattered the North Korean Army, which effectively ceased to exist south of the Yalu River.

In November 1950 the Communist Chinese intervened on behalf of North Korea, and through September 1951 the war was one of mobility, with the belligerents repeatedly seizing and being driven back from large areas on both sides of the 38th parallel. Thereafter the war entered a phase of protracted, positional warfare, in which both sides operated from semi-fixed lines and fortified strong points, akin to the character of World War I warfare. The war became a battle for hills and ridges, which changed hands often, sometimes several times in one day. The battles were close and personal, with the infantry often fighting side-by-side with the artillery, and man-to-man with the enemy.



Known as a "police action" with no formal declaration of war, the Korean War did not end with an accustomed victory, but in a stalemate, with an armistice or cease-fire agreement on 27 July 1953.

Military commanders of the North Korean Army, the Chinese People's Volunteers, and the United Nations Command signed the agreement, but no comprehensive peace agreement was put into place. A demilitarized zone (DMZ) was created between the opposing lines, and a truce line, which replaced the 38th parallel as a boundary, was drawn. The DMZ runs northeast from the Han River Estuary, less than 30 miles from Seoul, to the north of the 38th parallel on the eastern coast of Korea.

During the period of hostilities 60 percent of the 424,000 members of the Corps served in Korea, 122,000 of whom were Reservists. At the end, 33,107 Marines were stationed in Korea. At its peak strength on 30 September 1953, the Marine Corps had 261,343 members on active duty, including 14,731 African-American Marines and almost 3,000 Women Marines. Forty-two Marines were awarded Medals of Honor, 28 of which were awarded posthumously. Some 30,544 Marine casualties were suffered and of these 4,262 were killed in action. This was more than twice the toll of World War I.

In many ways Korea was a puzzling experience for Americans, and a first: a modern, undeclared, and limited war. From the conflict a greater awareness of the threat of Communism and the requirement for a balanced and diversified military force was painfully acquired. The Marine Corps had played a pivotal role in the conflict, proving that a complete reliance on strategic airpower and the threat of atomic weapons was not sufficient in modern warfare.

## Wartime Activities at Camp Lejeune

Camp Lejeune and the 2nd MarDiv, reconstituted after having initially provided a significant amount of the 1st MarDiv's manpower in 1950, remained focused on the Atlantic, Caribbean, and Mediterranean, while also serving as a replacement pool for the Marines in Korea.

Despite ongoing construction and the activity of reorganization, from 1946-1950 Camp Lejeune was quiet relative to its bustling World War II period. Summer reserve training, the semi-annual rotation of a battalion to the Navy's 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean, and occasional exercises continued at the base; however, it wasn't until 21 April 1950 that the first major post-World War II landing exercise, Operation Crossover, occurred at Onslow Beach. At the time the 2nd MarDiv had a ceiling strength of 10,232, but the division was well below that number with only 8,923 Marine and Navy personnel. Under this organization, the division consisted of two infantry regiments, the 2nd and the 6th Marines, with two battalions per regiment and two rifle companies per battalion.

During this period Camp Lejeune housed four major commands: Marine Corps Base (MCB); the 2nd MarDiv; Force Troops, Atlantic; and Marine Corps Air Facility (MCAF) New River, along with its assigned aviation elements. Three Navy commands were also tenants: the Naval Hospital, still located in Building H-1; the Field Medical Service School at Camp Geiger; and the Medical Field Research Laboratory in Building 66.



Circa 1950s postcard depicting training exercises at Camp Lejeune.



Marine Corps Base, with its various schools and geographically separated facilities, underwent reorganizations during this period in response to diminishing personnel strength and efforts to increase operational and economic efficiencies. The sole post battalion, Headquarters and Service (H&S) Battalion, was divided into three battalions on 1 June 1954: Headquarters, Service, and Military Police (MP) Battalions. MP Battalion was subsequently deactivated in August 1958 and its assets went to Headquarters Battalion. The next year Service Battalion was also deactivated and merged into Headquarters Battalion. Before its demise Service Battalion's Supply Company was reorganized as the Base Material Company and became the Base Material Battalion on 1 May 1957, which left MCB with two battalions. The post's dual mission has remained effectively unchanged since then: to provide housing, training facilities, and logistical support for FMF units and other units assigned; and to conduct specialized schools and other training.

Following the Korean War reorganizations likewise took place within other commands and schools on base. Initially the Engineer School Company was redesignated as a battalion; in 1955 the battalion became the Marine Corps Engineer School. In 1954 the Supply School Battalion became Marine Corps Supply Schools. The ITR, formed October 1953 at Camp Geiger, remained the 1st ITR, and the Rifle Range Detachment remained unchanged at Stones Bay. On 1 March 1957 the 2nd Combat Service Regiment of Force Troops, formerly belonging to the 2ndMarDiv, was designated as the 2nd Force Service Regiment (FSR) and in 1958 moved to Hadnot Point from Camp Geiger. The organization of all of Camp Lejeune's commands was to prove dynamic and responsive to changing needs and circumstances for the remainder of the twentieth century.

## Role of the Reserves

Because of the military downsizing that had taken place since the end of World War II, the reserve forces were critical to building up U.S. military personnel strength quickly once the U.S. was engaged in the Korean War. At the onset of the engagement there were only 27,656 Marines in the FMF: 7,779 in the 1st MarDiv and 8,973 in the 2nd MarDiv. Had the 1st and 2nd MarDivs been combined, the new unit would still have been 20 percent short of wartime division strength.

Officials at Camp Lejeune were told on 19 July 1950, the date the President authorized the mobilization of the Organized Marine Corps Reserve (OMCR), to expect its first Reservists on 1 August. Camp Lejeune headquarters had carefully reviewed the facilities and supplies available for feeding, processing, and training the incoming Marines and had determined that measures had to be taken to expand facilities and increase supplies in proportion to the demand. As expected, 5,805 Reservists arrived at the base on 1 August and consisted of key infantry, artillery, and engineer units of the OMCR. The OMCR Reservists were followed by the Volunteer Reserves, whose bulk orders started to go out 15 August. When the reserve unit checked in, they were mustered into active service, disbanded, and then their people were distributed among the division's regular units, following which they were shipped by train to Camp Pendleton.

Those Reservists who were stationed at Camp Lejeune on 19 August 1953 also had a new address. The "Marine Barracks" designation, which had defined the base since 1941, was dropped, and the base was now simply "Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune."

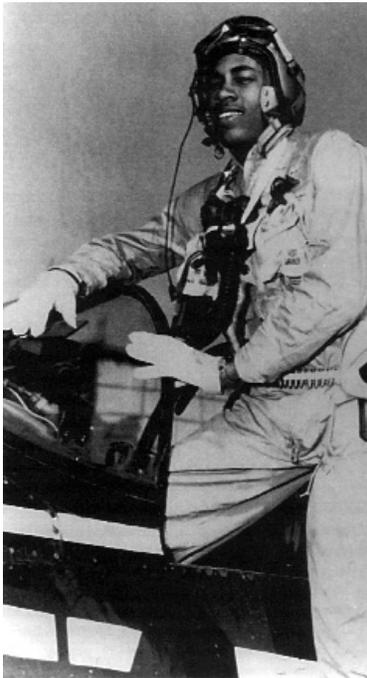
To put the role the Reservists played in the Korean War in proper perspective, consider Major General Oliver P. Smith's observation that "without the reserves, the Inchon landing of 15 September would have been impossible." Subsequent operations would likewise have been unthinkable. During the Inchon-Seoul operation, 15 September to 7 October 1950, 43.8 percent of the 1st MarDiv were Reservists. Having sent every possible regular westward, the 2nd MarDiv consisted of 19,895 Reservists on 31 December 1950, and by spring 1951 the reserves had reached their peak strength for the war with 85,538 on active duty, which constituted 45 percent of Corps overall active-duty strength. The flexibility and readiness capability inherent in the Marine Corps FMF, and the existence of a militarily proficient and readily available reserve, ensured success in the war.

## African-American Marines and Women Marines

The deactivation of Montford Point Camp on 8 September 1949 as an African-American training center and barracks area became the real turning point for the elimination of segregated units and the beginning of the meaningful initiation of desegregation in the Marine Corps. It was the Korean War, however, that greatly facilitated this effort. Units from all over the globe, including all-black units, poured into Camp Lejeune and Camp Pendleton in 1950 to help bring the 1stMarDiv to wartime strength. Their subsequent integration into all the division's subordinate units helped to achieve in reality what heretofore had been only policy, and one that had not yet received universal acceptance. In the meantime another milestone was reached on 8 September 1949 when Annie E. Graham became the first African-American woman to be allowed to enlist in the Marine Corps. At the outbreak of the Korean War 1,502 African-American Marines were on active duty, making up 2 percent of the total strength of the Corps. Between June 1950 and July 1952 over 10,000 more joined, so that in 1953, with the war drawing to a close, a total of 14,731 African-American Marines were on active duty, equaling 6 percent of the total Corps strength.

On 10 November 1945 Frederick C. Branch, who had begun his military career at Montford Point Camp and had served with the 51st Defense Battalion, became the first African-American commissioned officer in the Marine Corps. By his release in 1952, Branch had reached the rank of captain.

On 24 July 1950 the WM returned to Camp Lejeune with a company of approximately 225. The "old" WM barracks, Buildings 60 and 63, were reoccupied and Building 62 once again served for recreation, but this time only the second deck was reserved for WM. For the next two decades this small area would be the sole purview of WM until all-female units were eliminated in the mid-1970s.



At the time of this photo, Frank E. Petersen, Jr., was a 2dLt assigned to the 1st MAW. He was one of only two African-American officers to serve during the Korean War.

## Active Duty

Beginning on 19 July 1950 Marine Reservists were called to active duty and the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the Corps to bring the 1st and 2nd MarDivs to war strength levels. After the departure of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, formed around the 5th Marines, the 1st MarDiv was left with a strength of only 3,459. No other regiments were available, since the 1st Marines and the 7th Marines had been disbanded on 1 October 1949. Regulars (in short supply), Reservists, and recruits would have to be used to reconstitute the 1st and 7th Marines, as well as the 11th Marines, whose sole battalion, the 1st Battalion, had deployed with the 5th Marines. Essentially, the 2nd MarDiv became the 1st MarDiv, and the 2nd MarDiv was rebuilt. Although the 2nd MarDiv wouldn't be at Inchon or the follow-on capture of Seoul by name, its Marines would be there. For all practical purposes, the numerical designation of its regiments would change to those of the 1st MarDiv: the 2nd Marines became the 1st Marines, the 6th Marines became the 7th Marines, and the 10th Marines became the 11th Marines. By 5 August 1950 the 2nd MarDiv had contributed all but its headquarters and a cadre to the troop buildup, with 6,800 of its Marines having gone to Camp Pendleton. The 1st MarDiv was reported at wartime strength, minus the reinforced 5th Marines waiting in Korea, on 15 August, just 27 days after the buildup began.

Meanwhile the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade proved to be the difference in holding the allied line at the South Korean port of Pusan. The brigade was then absorbed into the 1st MarDiv and on 15 September 1950 the division stormed across the tidal flats and seawalls of Inchon, completely reversing the military situation and safeguarding the port for South Korea for the war's duration.

Several of Camp Lejeune's former tenant activities were reactivated at that time. In October 1950 the FMSS was reactivated at Camp Lejeune. In 1951 ITR was reestablished at the Tent Camp, where it was joined by Force Troops, FMFLant, which was activated on 1 April 1951 as a result of the Marines' desire to increase the mobility of their divisions. By May 1951 the World War II tents and Homosote huts at Tent Camp had been replaced by concrete buildings and Quonset huts, and on 8 January 1952 Tent Camp was renamed Camp Geiger in honor of the late General Roy S. Geiger, USMC.

ITR was to undergo continual improvement over the remainder of the decade based on recent experience. Beginning in 1953 Individual Combat Training (ICT) was begun as a result of deficiencies noted in Korea, and by 1960 ICT was a requirement for all boot camp graduates. Instruction was divided into three general categories: tactics, weapons, and general subjects.

Advanced Combat Training (ACT) was added in 1956 to provide further instruction for six-month Reservists who had graduated from ICT and included more specialized topics, such as helicopter operations and escape, evasion, and survival techniques.

One rarely mentioned tenant at the base that made a significant contribution to the war was the Medical Field Research Laboratory. This and a few other Navy labs throughout the country conducted experiments and research relating to the medical aspects of combat. In 1951 Camp Lejeune's

A Marine rifleman during operations in Korea (*below*).

In addition to standard command, liaison, and observation duties, Marine Sikorsky HO3S helicopters were used during the Korean War to fly search and rescue missions behind enemy lines and to evacuate wounded (*middle and bottom*).



lab developed the armored vest, the upper body armor thereafter commonly referred to as a "flak jacket." Adopted by the Marines and other services, this innovation reduced fatal wounds among its wearers by 30 percent.

## Other Operations

In addition to fighting in Korea, Marines from Camp Lejeune belonging to the 2nd MarDiv, Force Troops, FMFLant (or simply Force Troops), and aviation elements at MCAF New River participated in a rigorous exercise schedule during the 1950s and were committed to numerous Cold War skirmishes in trouble spots created or abetted by Communist interests. Notable among these were the Suez Crisis, where, in the midst of the Israeli-Arab war of 1956, Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 3/2, consisting primarily of the 3rd Battalion of the 2nd Marines, made the first Marine landing in the Mediterranean in 52 years and evacuated 1,500 people from Egypt and the Gaza Strip on 1 and 2 November. In 1958, during the Lebanon Intervention, the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines; the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines; and the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Battalions, 8th Marines landed in Beirut at the request of the Lebanese president to stop the civil war. During the Cuban Revolution of 1959 the 4th Provisional Marine Force stood by in Cuban waters to protect U.S. interests from 20 November 1959 to 15 February 1960, while other Camp Lejeune Marines reinforced the Guantanamo Naval Base as rebels led by Fidel Castro overthrew Cuba's Batista regime.

## Marine Corps Air Facility New River

In 1951 the air facility at Peterfield Point was reopened and commissioned as Marine Corps Air Facility (MCAF) New River. One gunnery sergeant recalled that when he arrived in 1952 there were only about 16 men assigned to the air facility. There were no barracks, so the unmarried enlisted men lived at Tent Camp No. 2 (Camp Geiger) north of the air facility, and married Marines, who lived in family quarters, were ferried across the river each morning.

The six existing buildings located on the eastern side of the field were crowded, since they housed all the facility's functions, including operations, aerology, aircraft maintenance, and a sick bay. But by 1953 the facility had taken on a permanent appearance with a new wooden frame hangar and six concrete and steel barracks that were erected on the western side of the airfield. The three-story, squadbay-type barracks, opened in 1954, were centrally located between the hangar, mess hall, and service club. The latter included both an enlisted Service Club and a Staff NCO Club, although both were modest at first. By 1975 an \$800,000 Staff NCO club with sweeping riverfront views had replaced the older building.

## Marine Helicopters and the Korean War

The Marines' utilization of helicopters had first been tested at Camp Lejeune during the late 1940s. During Operation Packard II, conducted on 23 May 1946, Helicopter Experimental Squadron-1 (HMX-1) simulated the lifting of a regiment across Onslow Beach, using their primitive HO3S-1 helicopters. It was a modest beginning to the era of vertical envelopment: 103 carrier flights



were required from the converted "jeep" carrier USS Palau to lift the 66 representative Marines and assorted gear into the objective area. But theory had become fact: the first vertical envelopment assault had taken place. And Marine Corps Schools (MCS) Quantico, as a result of this experience, was able to complete their doctrinal publication: in November 1948 they issued a 52-page booklet entitled Amphibious Operations-Employment of Helicopters (Tentative), also known as PHIB-31.

The Korean War presented the Marine Corps with an opportunity to use and expand its helicopter doctrine. As the originators of the concept of vertical envelopment, Marines also compiled several "firsts" with respect to helicopter employment in the usual conduct of business. When the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade deployed to Korea in 1950, the rotary unit attached to Marine Observation Squadron-6 (VMO-6) became the first helicopter unit to be trained and organized for combat. On 31 August 1951 VMO-6 was joined by Marine Helicopter Transport Squadron- 161 (HMR-161), which was the first helicopter transport squadron in existence. As another example, on 21 September 1951 HMR-161 lifted 224 fully equipped Marines of the 1st MarDiv Reconnaissance Company to a highly inaccessible Korean hilltop using HRS (H-19) helicopters, thereby conducting the first lift of a ground unit in combat. The Marine Corps once again found itself in the forefront of tactical innovation and had now developed a doctrine that would permit the continued execution of its traditional mission into the atomic age.

On 14 July 1954, three years after it was recommissioned, MCAF New River became home to the two squadrons of its first major helicopter unit, Marine Aircraft Group (MAG)-26 (initially designated MAG(H)-26), which was moved to New River from Cherry Point, where it had been activated on 16 June 1952. The 1,000 or so men assigned to MAG-26 occupied the six barracks newly built in July 1954. VMO-1, however, was the oldest squadron at the facility and had been operating aircraft, both helicopters and fixed-wing, at least two years before the arrival of the MAG.

### The Douglas-Mansfield Act

The National Security Act of 1947 created a National Military Establishment (NME) with three military departments, the Army, the Navy, and the newly independent Air Force (previously part of the Army), and perpetuated the establishment of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The act, as a matter of law, also recognized the Marine



Col. H. Avery Chenoweth served as a platoon commander in the 1st MarDiv during the Korean War. In 2002, his combat art, including "This Way!," which depicts Marines debarking from HRS-1 helicopters, was featured in *Fortitudine*, the Bulletin of the Marine Corps Historical Program.



Marine helicopters played pivotal roles in combat and transport during the Korean War.

Corps as a separate service under the Department of the Navy, provided for a Fleet Marine Force (FMF), and assigned roles and missions to each military branch. In 1949 amendments to the National Security Act redesignated the NME as the Department of Defense, removed the three service secretaries from Cabinet-level status and placed them under the new Cabinet-level Secretary of Defense, and redefined the roles and missions of the military services. Under this organization, the Marine Corps did not suffer from a lack of missions, but it suffered from a lack of resources to accomplish the ones it had. And although the Corps had been recognized in law, it still lacked statutory protection from being eliminated.

Security for the Corps finally arrived on 28 June 1952, when the Douglas-Mansfield Act, otherwise known as the "Marine Corps Bill," became Public Law 416. The Act secured a seat on the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the USMC commandant when matters of concern to the Marine Corps were being discussed. The law also established an FMF with a minimum of three combat divisions and three aircraft wings, and raised the ceiling on active-duty personnel strength to 400,000. The law also recognized the Corps for its primacy in amphibious warfare. The Marine Corps therefore became the only armed service whose principal mission, minimum size, and basic structure were detailed by public law.

