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Surviving Marine Corps Basic Training

There are two locations which turn men into Marines: the Recruit Training Depot at Parris Island, South Carolina, and the Recruit Training Depot at San Diego, California. Where you go depends largely upon where you enlist. Those who enlist west of the Mississippi will likely go through boot camp in San Diego, while those in the East will attend at Parris Island. There is only one boot camp to turn women into Marines -- Parris Island.

Other than geographical differences, such as the lack of sand fleas and better outdoor exercise weather for "Hollywood Marines," the training is virtually identical at both locations.

Parris Island graduates more than 17,000 Marines per year. The average daily male recruit population is 3,786. The average daily female recruit population is 600. San Diego graduates more than 21,000 Marines per year. The average age of male recruits is 19.1, and female recruits is 19.3.

Without doubt, Marine boot camp is more challenging -- both physically and mentally -- than the basic training programs of any of the other military services. Not only are the physical requirements much higher, but recruits are required to learn and memorize a startling amount of information. There are more than 70 "training days" in a period a little longer than 12 weeks (but don't let that fool you. There is lots of "training" going on on the "non-training days," such as the time in Reception, the time spent in "forming," and on Sundays and Holidays. It has been said time and time again by former Marines that Marine Corps recruit training was the most difficult thing they ever had to do in their entire lives.

The more you can prepare in advance, the better off you will be.

It's important that you get into some semblance of physical shape. Concentrate on running three miles and long marches (up to 10 miles). Sit-ups and pull-ups are also important. If you are unable to perform basic exercises, you may spend a significant amount of time in PCP (the Physical Conditioning Platoon). PCP is tough: PCP's objective is physical fitness, and that's what you'll be concentrating in while in the program. Individual remain in PCP until they can. While it is normally a 21 day program, once you're in, you don't get out until you can do 3 pull ups, 40 sit ups in 2 minutes, and run 3 miles in 28:00 minutes.

If you arrive overweight, your Drill Instructor will put you on a "Diet Tray" for your meals. (On the other hand, if you arrive underweight, you may be put on "double-rations.")

In Marine boot camp, you'll start drill almost immediately. A few hours studying basic [drill and ceremony](#) will help immensely. As with the other services, you should memorize [U.S. Marine Corps Rank](#).

Additionally, your recruiter should have told you to memorize the [11 General Orders for a Sentry](#). While not mandatory, the [Marine Rifle Creed](#) is nice to know. You should also memorize the [Marine's Hymn](#), all of it, if possible, but at least the first verse.

Wait -- that's not all (I told you it was tough). You'll need to memorize the [USMC Core Values](#), study [Marine Corps history](#), and commit the characteristics of the [M16A4 Rifle](#) to memory. Round all of this out by memorizing the [Code of Conduct](#).

If you don't know how to swim, try to learn before you leave for boot camp. Before you graduate, you'll have to demonstrate basic swimming skills.

The other services have lists of what you should or should not bring with you. The Marines make it simple: Don't bring anything except your important papers (such as driver's license, social security card, and banking information), except the clothes on your back. Everything you need will be issued to you. For non-issue items, it will be issued, and the cost taken out of your pay.

Medication. Over-the-counter medication is not allowed in basic training. If you bring any with you, it will be taken away. All prescription medication will be re-evaluated by a military doctor upon arrival. If the doctor determines that the prescription is necessary, the civilian medication will be taken away, and the recruit will be re-issued the medication by the military pharmacy. This includes birth control pills (for women). Women are usually encouraged to continue taking birth control pills during basic training, if they took them before going to basic, to ensure that their systems maintain their regular cycle.

I'm often asked what females do during their (to put it politely) "time of the month," at basic training. The answer is nothing different. Pads and tampons are readily available, and women use them and continue with training. Bathroom breaks are given often enough that changing pads/tampons are not a problem. Many women report that they don't have a cycle during their entire time at basic training, due to the high levels of activity and stress. The thing to remember is that thousands of women have been to basic before you, and they survived just fine.

Marine boot camp is officially 12 weeks of training, plus 1 week of processing -- this isn't quite fair, as the training and discipline starts as soon as you step off the bus at Receiving.

Receiving

The first stop is at Recruit Receiving, where new recruits spend the first few days of their recruit training experience. Here they will receive their first haircut and their initial gear issue, which includes items like uniforms, toiletries and letter writing supplies. During this time recruits will also be given a full medical and dental screening, and take the Initial Strength Test. This test consists of a one and a half mile run, sit-ups and pull-ups to test recruits to see if they're in shape to begin training.

The other services give you a slight break during the in-processing phase. Not the Marine Corps: Discipline starts the second you walk off the bus. Like Air Force Basic Training, you'll immediately find out that Marine Corps drill instructors are addressed (loudly) as "Sir," or "Ma'am." You won't even get into the building before you're given your first lesson -- you'll be instructed that Article 86 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice prohibits absence without leave. Article 91 prohibits disobedience to a lawful order. Article 93 prohibits disrespect to a senior officer. Those are absolute, non-breakable laws that you will live by for the next 13 weeks.

You'll most likely begin the process late at night, or in the early morning hours. The other services do a quick processing and allow you to rack out for the rest of the night. In the Marine Corps, you'll be up the entire first night, and all of the next day (so get plenty of sleep on that bus, train, or plane).

During this day and a half, you'll complete paperwork processing, get your hair all cut off, turn in every single bit of civilian clothing and articles you own, be issued initial uniforms & field gear (canteen, web belt, poncho, field jacket, gloves, etc.), and various needed personal items which will come from the PX (these items will be deducted from your pay).

During this period, you will learn something very important about Marine boot camp: everything is done "by the numbers" -- including the simple process of going to the bathroom (excuse me, "head") and taking a shower.

1. Line up
2. March to shower head
3. Pull the ring and wet your head
4. Soap your head and face thoroughly
5. Rinse
6. Soap your left arm. Etc.

You'll spend between 3-5 days in Receiving. During this time, you'll think you're already in boot camp. Drill Instructors will be yelling at you, you'll do some drill, some marching, wear uniforms, eat, drink, shower, and um.....other things "by the numbers," get chewed out some more, learn to make your bunk (I mean "rack"), etc.

While in Receiving, you'll be given the Initial Strength Test (IST). To pass (and avoid the Physical Conditioning Platoon), you'll be required to do 2 dead-hang pull-ups, 44 crunches in 2 minutes, and a 1.5 mile run in 13.5 minutes (males). Females are required to run 1.5 miles in 15 minutes, perform a flex-arm hang of 12 seconds, and do 44 crunches in 2 minutes.

You cannot wear contact lenses during basic training. You also cannot wear your civilian glasses, once you have been issued your official government-issue glasses. GI glasses are not pretty to look at. In fact, most people call them "BC Glasses," or "birth control glasses," on the basis that nobody has ever been known to "get lucky" while wearing them. During your first couple of days of basic training, you'll undergo a complete eye examination. If you require glasses to have 20/20 vision, you will be issued BC Glasses (takes a few days after the examination to get them). BC Glasses have thick, hard-plastic frames, with thick, hard-plastic lenses (very hard to break). Think of the movie, *Revenge of the Nerds*. Once you receive them, they are the only glasses you are allowed to wear, while at basic training. However, if you don't really need glasses to see, you won't be required to wear them. Once you graduate basic training, you can wear your civilian glasses again, as long as they conform to military dress and appearance regulations. Generally, that means their color must be conservative (no green, glow-in-the-dark frames), no designs or decorations on the frames, and no tinted lenses when indoors, or outdoors when in military formation (ie, when lined up for marching). Of course, this only applies when wearing a military uniform. In civilian clothes (after basic training) you can pretty much wear whatever kind of glasses you want.

However, you ain't seen nothing yet. After your stint in Receiving, you'll be transported to your new home to meet your Senior Drill Instructor and his/her two assistants.

A word About Your Pay

Direct Deposit is mandatory for military pay. Unlike the other services, which allow members to have their pay during basic direct-deposited into any bank account, the Corps require new recruits to open up a bank account in the on-base bank or credit union to receive their pay during basic training. This is done during in-processing at basic. Following graduation from basic, recruits can then change their "direct deposit" to any bank account of their choosing.

During your in-processing, you will complete paperwork to begin your military pay. Military personnel are paid on the 1st and 15th of each month. If those days fall on a non-duty day, you are paid on the duty day, preceeding. Your pay is direct-deposited into your bank account.

So, when will you receive your first paycheck? Good question, and one that can't be answered accurately. In general, if your military pay information is entered into the Finance Computer System prior to the 7th of the month, you'll receive your first paycheck on the following 15th. If the information is entered into the Finance Computer System after the 7th of the month, but prior to the 23rd of the month, you'll receive your first paycheck on the following 1st. However, please note that the date you fill out the paperwork during in-processing and the date the information is input into the Finance Computer System are not the same dates. A Finance Clerk is going to take the paperwork you filled out, and enter it into the Computer. However, the clerk is entering the information of hundreds of other recruits at the same time, so it may take several days before yours gets entered. I always advise people to estimate that the first paycheck won't be deposited until a full 30 days after arrival. That way, if you're paid before that, it's an unexpected surprise, and if it takes the entire 30 days, it's what you were expecting anyway.

In any case, your first paycheck will contain all the pay you have coming to you at that point. For recruits without dependents, that means [base pay](#), only. For those with dependents, it means base pay and [housing allowance](#). Your first paycheck will be "pro-rated" to the number of days you've been on active duty. For example, if you receive your first paycheck 30 days after arrival, you will receive the full-rate of the monthly basic pay in that paycheck, and (if you have dependents), the full rate for the monthly housing allowance. If, however, you receive your first paycheck two weeks after arrival, it will contain 1/2 of the monthly base pay, and 1/2 of the monthly housing allowance (for those with dependents). Of course, taxes and other deductions (such as deductions for non-issue items, such as running shoes, soap, shampoo, laundry, ect.) are taken out.

Basic Training is broken down into three basic phases: The First Phase is Basic Learning; physical and mental. The Second Phase is Rifle Training and the Third Phase is Field Training.

The first part of week one is called "forming." The Drill Instructors "form" new recruits by a process known as "total immersion."

Forming is the period when recruits are taken to their training companies and they "meet" their drill instructors for the first time. During Forming's 3-5 days, recruits learn the basics: how to march, how to wear their uniform, how to secure their weapon, etc. This period of time allows recruits to adjust to the recruit training way of life before the first actual training day.

Immediately, you'll be expected to learn a brand new vocabulary (no mistakes allowed!). You don't go "upstairs," you go "topside." You don't go downstairs, you go "down below." Your bunk becomes a "rack." The latrine is a "head." The floor is a "deck." The walls are "bulkheads." The windows are "portholes." the ceiling is an "overhead." You face "forward." Behind you is "aft." Facing forward, left is "port," and right is "starboard." Never, EVER call the D.I.'s office an "office." It is, and always will be the "D.I. House."

Third-person language is also a cardinal rule. It's not "me," or "I," it's "this recruit." It's not "them," or "us," it's "these recruits," or "those recruits." Never, **EVER**, say the word, "you" to your drill instructor. The proper phrase would be "Sir, this recruit does not understand the drill instructor's request, sir." (Shouted at the top of your lungs, of course).

While I use the word, "D.I." in this article, Never, **EVER**, call your drill instructor a "D.I." Your drill instructor is referred to as "Drill Instructor [Rank][Name]."

Drill instructors are not supposed to use profanity, nor are they allowed to physically touch a recruit (other than for safety reasons, such as on the weapon's range). So, how to they maintain discipline? In the other services, it may be push-ups, or possibly some running. In the Marine Corps, you get "quarter-decked."

Your three drill instructors work as an effective team. The senior D.I. gives most of the commands and orders. The "second hat," or "Heavy A," singles out those who seem to be having problems understanding simple shouted English and administers note-worthy tongue-lashings. To keep things interesting, the "Third Hat," administers the physical discipline, known officially as IPT (Incentive Physical Training), unofficially known as "quarter-decking."

IPT consists of prescribed exercises (a maximum of five minutes outside in "the pit," no maximum inside). Exercises one can expect if one is "quarter-decked" are: bends & thrusts, leg lifts, side lunges, mountain climbing, running in place, side straddle hops, and push-ups, done as fast as the D.I. can "encourage" you to. D.I.'s use a combination of individual and group IPTs to keep the platoon "on their toes."

During the "forming" portion of week one, you and your platoon won't be able to do anything right, and you'll be quarter-decked often. Some "jobs" can expect to be quarter-decked more than usual. Because of their relative high-visibility, the person chosen as platoon leader, as well as squad leaders, and those chosen to be "administrative assistants" to the Senior D.I. can expect more than their fair share of quarter-decking.

A Word About "Punishment"

Jason, a member of our [message forum](#), adds the following:

We didn't get "dropped," so to speak, at Parris Island. If you mess up a general order, they'll usually give you another chance to get it right. If it's obvious you don't know what the hell you're talking about, they'll either send you to the quarterdeck or, if they can't quarterdeck you right then, they'll give your name to the scribe, and you'll be put on one of two lists: the "Kill List," which the drill instructor will call everyone on the kill list up to the quarterdeck later on and smoke them, or the Firewatch List, where you'll get to wake up at 0100 or so and stay awake for an hour doing next to nothing. There's 16 firewatch per night, so everybody gets firewatch every 4-5 nights, but firewatch as punishment is always brutal on a night you were hoping to sleep. The quarterdeck can last a long, long time. I was up there for a total of about 4 hours on Christmas Eve (I didn't qualify my first try on the rifle range, but shot Sharpshooter the next

time out). You're basically exercising your @\$ off and sounding off at the top of your lungs at the same time. Anything from pushups, crunches, running in place, arm rotations, side straddle hops, steam engines and more can be used on the quarterdeck or the pit. If you're a guide, squad leader, or "special recruit," expect to get smoked on a daily basis. I was only up on the quarterdeck 8 or 9 times total in the 12 weeks of training (there's no physical punishment during Receiving).

One more word about discipline: It's a whole lot easier to get into Marine boot camp than it is to get out of it. The Marines traditionally only fail about 15 percent of all recruits. D.I.'s are a stubborn lot, and while it's possible to finally get thrown out, the way to discharge will be long and hard (simply refusing is not an option -- that way lies court-martial).

Almost every single day of Marine boot camp you'll experience Physical Training (P.T.). This normally consist of six limbering exercises, followed by the "daily dozen" (side-startle hops, bends & thrusts, rowing exercise, side benders, leg lifts, toe touches, mountain climbing, trunk twisters, push-ups, bend and reach, body twists, and squat benders), up to 15 reps each, and up to three sets of each. This is in addition to required runs and long-distance marches.

Recruit training uses a progressive physical training program, which builds up recruits to Marine Corps standards. Recruits will experience Table PT, a period of training in which a drill instructor leads several platoons through a series of demanding exercises while he stands on a table. Recruits will also run, either individually or as a platoon or squad. Other PT consists of obstacle courses, circuit courses, or 3-, 5- or 10-mile conditioning marches.

Most nights you'll get a full 8 hours of uninterrupted sleep. However, the Marine Corps Recruit Training Regulation allows the Basic Training Commanding General to reduce this requirement to 7 hours. The above does not apply when a recruit is required to perform guard duty, fire/security watch, mess duty, or when the series/company is engaged in scheduled night events. Under such circumstances, the hours of sleep may be reduced to a minimum of six hours. When such a deviation is authorized, the eight-hour sleep regimen will be restored as soon as possible after the event/circumstances no longer exist. During the Crucible Event, recruits will normally receive four hours of sleep per night.

In addition to 8 hours of sleep, you'll get some "free time" each day. The purpose of free time is to allow recruits to read, write letters, watch instructional television (ITV), and to take care of other personal needs. It is a period when no training is received by recruits and no instruction is conducted by Drill Instructors. Free Time is intended to be a relief period from close, constant association for both recruits and DI's and to take care of personal hygiene and other personal needs. The Marine Corps Recruit Training Regulation requires the DIs to give you one hour of uninterrupted free time each evening, beginning on the first training day, while in garrison (ie, not out in the field), Monday through Saturday, and four hours on Sundays and holidays while in garrison. Company commanders may authorize two hours of free time on Saturdays. However, company commanders may also suspend free time for recruits as a result of punishment imposed by administrative or legal proceedings. Mail is passed out each day by the DI's prior to free time.

You may not think you have any rights in boot camp, but you would be mistaken. The Marine Corps Recruit Training Regulation lists the following "recruit rights:"

- a) Eight hours of uninterrupted sleep, except under the conditions mentioned earlier in this article
- b) One hour of free time daily, unless removed for punishment, and during processing, forming, weapons and field/combat training, and the Crucible Event.
- c) 20 minutes to consume each meal.
- d) Attend sick call.
- e) Attend scheduled religious services.
- f) Request mast via the chain-of-command.

- g) Make and receive emergency phone calls.
- h) Receive mail on the day it is received by the parent company except for Sundays, holidays, and during the Crucible Event.
- i) Send mail without fear of censorship.
- j) Make head calls.
- k) Use medication prescribed by a certified military medical officer.

The Marine Corps has recently increased emphasis on close combat training, and you'll begin this training during week one with an introduction to bayonet fighting. You'll also experience your first 1.5 mile formation run, and be introduced to your closest buddy in boot camp: your M16A2 rifle.

The Marine Corps has added martial arts to its Boot Camp program in November 2000 - the biggest change to boot camp since the Crucible was added four years before that. Recruits I get about 15 hours of martial-arts training at boot camp and will receive another six hours of training during the Marine Combat Training. Only then will qualified Marines earn their first belt, which is tan. Ultimately, Marines can work toward a gray, green, brown or black belt throughout their careers.)

No article on Marine boot camp would be complete without mentioning this very important aspect. During your 13 weeks, you will spend countless hours taking this rifle apart, cleaning it thoroughly, and putting it back together. Countless hours!

The remaining hours of week 1 (what hours?) will be comprised of various academic classes.