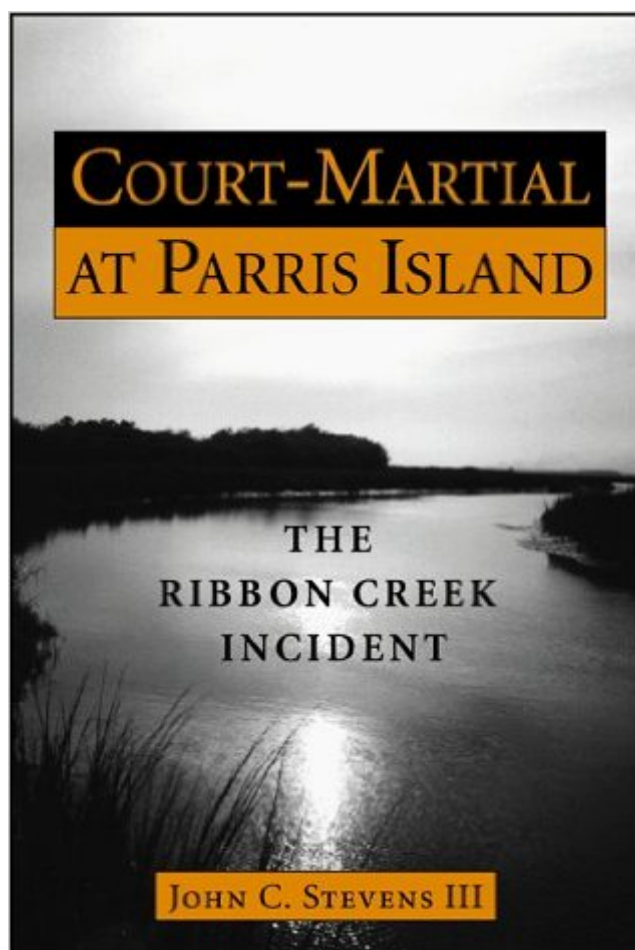


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# Court-Martial At Parris Island: The Ribbon Creek Incident



## Synopsis

On April 8, 1956, drill instructor Matthew McKeon led Platoon 71 on a forced night march through the backwaters of the Parris Island recruit depot in an effort to restore flagging discipline. An unexpectedly strong tidal current in Ribbon Creek swept over the recruits, and in the panic that followed

## Book Information

Hardcover: 184 pages

Publisher: Naval Institute Press (May 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1557508143

ISBN-13: 978-1557508140

Product Dimensions: 9.2 x 6.2 x 0.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (28 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

I want to begin my comments by saying this is an excellent balanced book and that Stevens deserves a lot of credit. I would further recommend it to any Marine or others interested in Marine Corps history. I will also state it is my opinion that S.Sgt. Matthew McKeon was a good man who made a tragic mistake. The factors leading up to the events of the evening of April 8, 1956 are manifold and can only be fully understood by reading Stevens' book. My personal perspective comes from having served in the USMCR and the USMC from October 1956 until August 1962 when I was Honorably discharged as a Corporal E-4. I went to Parris Island in early February of 1957 and my recruit training virtually overlaps the events of a year earlier, putting me at the rifle range at about the same time of year. Like all of us who went through boot training, I too pulled butts at the range. The discipline and control there was far different than back at main side so on several days I took the opportunity to spend my entire lunch break walking all over the Ribbon Creek area. I wanted to understand this incident. Definitions from Webster...Marine: Of or relating to the sea. Amphibious: Able to live on both land and in water. Swim: To propel oneself in water...To float on a liquid...DI Motto: Let's be damn sure that no man's ghost will ever say "If your training program

had only done its job."And from Chesty Puller we learn the mission of Marine Corps training! "...success in battle..."When I got to Parris Island, I was shocked to see recruits who could not swim had joined a service called the Marine Corps. I also thought it strange the USMC would accept anyone who could not swim, but I guess the Navy does too. How much W.W.

This is a lawyer's book -- a good one. In April 1956, a Marine drill instructor led a platoon of recruits on a night march into the tidal waters of Ribbon Creek in the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina. Some of the recruits strayed into deep water; six of them drowned. The public news media cried out for punishment of the responsible party. The public furor also was a threat to the continued funding of the Marine Corps. The most obvious target of this wrath was the drill instructor, Sgt. Matthew McKeon, who was all but abandoned by his commanding officers in a rush to judgment. The book follows the ordeal of Matthew McKeon from his immediate arrest and public condemnation by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, through a court of inquiry and then a general court-martial. The author is a retired judge of the family and probate court in Essex, Massachusetts, and also a former Marine who went through boot camp in Parris Island in 1957. In preparation for this book, Judge Stevens reviewed the official records of the government and also conducted interviews of many of the persons involved. Interestingly, the main character in the book is not Sgt. McKeon. The main character is Emile Zola Berman, an experienced New York civil trial lawyer who represented McKeon in the general court-martial without charging a fee. In contrast, General Randolph McCall Pate, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, is portrayed in a negative light and General Wallace Greene, who led the court of inquiry, is more or less given a free pass. The court-martial lasted more than three weeks; forty-eight witnesses testified. There were many rulings on the admissibility of evidence and on strategic and tactical matters.

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