

July 14, 1992

Alvin J. Banker MSgt, U.S.M.C. (Retired)
D.O.B. - 10 December 1923
Place: New Orleans, LA.
Parents: Loretta Guidry Banker & William Banker
Education: Graduated from McDonough #35 High School Jan. 1941
Attended the YMCA school of Commerce for one year
Marital Status: Married, four children

I volunteered in the Marine Corps and was sworn in on 16 July 1942, along with several other colored future marines. We were told that a camp was under construction and upon completion, would be used to train colored marines.

On 24 August 1942 I received orders to depart New Orleans, La. on 25 August and report to the commanding officer Marine Corps Base, New River, N.C. on 27 August. I met three other colored marines in New Orleans who were also going to New River. Their names are, Hill, Davis and Reeder. Davis and Hill were from Texas and I believe Reeder was from Lake Charles or Shreveport, La.

Our trip was not a pleasant one. Although we had Pulman and meal tickets we were denied Pulman service and ushered into the dining car after the other passengers had eaten and left. After being routed up and down the eastern seaboard from New Orleans, La, to Jacksonville, Fla, Penscola, Fla, Flomington, Ala, Florence, S.C. and Wilmington, N.C. we finally boarded a seashore transportation bus to Jacksonville, N.C. where upon our arrival we were met by two enlisted men and mounted a pickup truck to Montford Point. Due to the routing of the train we arrived a day late.

The next day we were brought before Col. Samuel Woods to explain our lateness and why our Pulman tickets were not used. After explanations were given, Col. Woods gave us a briefing about the camp. He stated that since Abraham Lincoln's picture is on the five dollar bill and he freed the slaves and George Washington's picture is on the one dollar bill and he is the father of our country, he put both together and thats how the first colored marines became the 51st Defense Battalion.

While in boot camp, those of us who had chosen to become cooks, butchers, barbers and bakers were put in the special duty platoon. We were trained by white marines. Two watches were formed (Port and Starboard). We cooked cleaned the galley and messhall as well as set up for newcomers. After supper our D.I. would have us fall out for close order drill, rifle and locker box inspection. This training went on for several weeks. As more recruits came on board our training was done on a Port and Starboard schedule during normal working hours.

Upon completion of boot camp in December 1942 more barracks were being built. In mid 1943 the 51st Defense Battalion was broken up and reorganization began. The following Battalions were formed: Headquarters, Recruit, Seven

Separate, Stewart Branch and 51st Defense Battalion. All food service personnel were transferred to the Stewards Branch Battalion, Maj. Madden was the C.O. Several food service personnel and myself were transferred to the rifle range detachment, there we had a field galley. The troops lived in pyramid tents while cinder block barracks were being built. The rifle range detachment was under the command of Recruit Training Battalion.

More black recruits were now being drafted into the corps and a number of them were illiterate. Within the Headquarters Battalion a schools company was formed to teach these recruits how to read and write. Some of the instructors were Julian Parker, Raymond B. Floyd (both college professors from Xavier University, New Orleans, La.) Raymond Young, Cecil B. Moore and Tiny Smith.

Promotion was virtually impossible, since a black could not outrank a white. The mess sergeant refused to teach me other aspects of the job, he wanted me to stay out in the galley and supervise the cooks and control the store room. Several months later the mess sergeant received orders to go overseas. This gave me an opportunity to put my bookkeeping and accounting knowledge to use. These are skills I had learned prior to coming into the Marine Corps. In late 1943 I was promoted to Technical Sergeant and then to Master Technical Sergeant in 1944.

The rifle range barracks used by blacks was closed by the end of 1945. I returned to Montford Point Camp and transferred to Recruit Depot Battalion and assigned to the recruit messhall.

On 20 September 1946, 1st Sgt. Max Rousseau and I received our first overseas assignment to the 6th Colored Replacement Draft. Prior to this transfer 1st Sgt. Rousseau and I were assigned to the rifle range detachment. We went to Saipan, M.I. and was assigned to a heavy artillery and aircraft group. From there to Guam, M.I. 8th Ammunition Company and finally 5th service supply depot. I then became N.C.O. in charge of subsistence supplies for the 5th Service Supply Depot. While on Guam in mid 1948 the Marine Corps began to integrate without incident. 1st Sgt. Max Rousseau became 1st Sgt. of H&S Co., 5th service supply depot, 1st Sgt. Bedford Kinsey was 1st Sgt. for the 49th depot at Camp Allen and GySgt. Oscar Culp as assigned Fire Chief.

In the spring of 1949 I was transferred from Guam, M.I. to Marine Barracks, N.A.D. Earle, N.J. to find that the Corps was still segregated. I was then transferred to force troops at Camp Geiger, Camp LeJeune, N.C. in mid 1951. In the summer of 1954 I received orders to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in Korea. However, upon my arrival at Camp Pendelton, Calif. my orders were changed to the 3rd Marine Division. The 3rd Marine Division was sent to Japan, where I was assigned to the 3rd Ordnance Bn.

From the 3rd Marine Division I was transferred to Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, Va. and assigned to Headquarters Battalion Women's Marine Messhall. It was my first encounter with women marines. I found that the women marines were as dedicated and gung-ho as the male marines. I met and married a woman Marine at Quantico. While at Quantico I was selected to write the technical test for the food service personnel in the Marine Corps. This was a most challenging job; it was quite an experience.

From Quantico my family and I went to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba where we remained for two years. While there we experienced the overthrow of Batista and the

From Guantanamo Bay I was transferred to Camp Lejeune, N.C. and served with 2nd FSR and 1st Bn., 2nd Marines 2nd Marine Division and assigned to the Headquarters Battalion, where I managed several messhalls and opened the new Division Headquarters Battalion Messhall.

Upon completion of duty on Okinawa I received orders to Marine Barracks, Philadelphia, Pa. in the fall of 1964. I retired there on 31 August 1966, after serving twenty four years in the Marine Corps.

During my career in the Corps, I attended Mess Management School at Fort Benning Ga, New York State Health Department Sanitation Course. Completed M.C.I. courses such as Basic Officers Extension course, Speech for Instructors, 1st Sergeant's Administrative course and many others.

There were many events that happened back then, that will never be forgotten. Being one of the first African American Marines was not easy, we met with many insults, hardships and disappointments.

The Special Duty Platoon which consisted of the first Black cooks, Bakers, Butchers and Barbers in the Marine Corps transformed many lives. We all made it through with the exception of two (one died from leukemia and one B.C.D.).

The following is a list of members of the Special Duty Platoon:

Robert Perry (N.C.)	Harold Hector (Ga.)
Otto Cherry (N.C.)	Edward Lee (Miss.)
Rudolph V. Francis (Tex.)	Cameron (Miss.)
Gilbert Rouzan (La.)	Alvin J. Banker (La.)
Walter Bates (Ga.)	Butch Davis (Tex.)
Jessie Brown (La.)	Jerome Alcorn (La.)
Frenchy Cooper (La.)	Reeder (La.)
Robert Parks (La.)	Lucas (Ohio)
Edwin Pearson (Tex.)	Barnes (Ohio)
James Stalsworth (Ohio)	