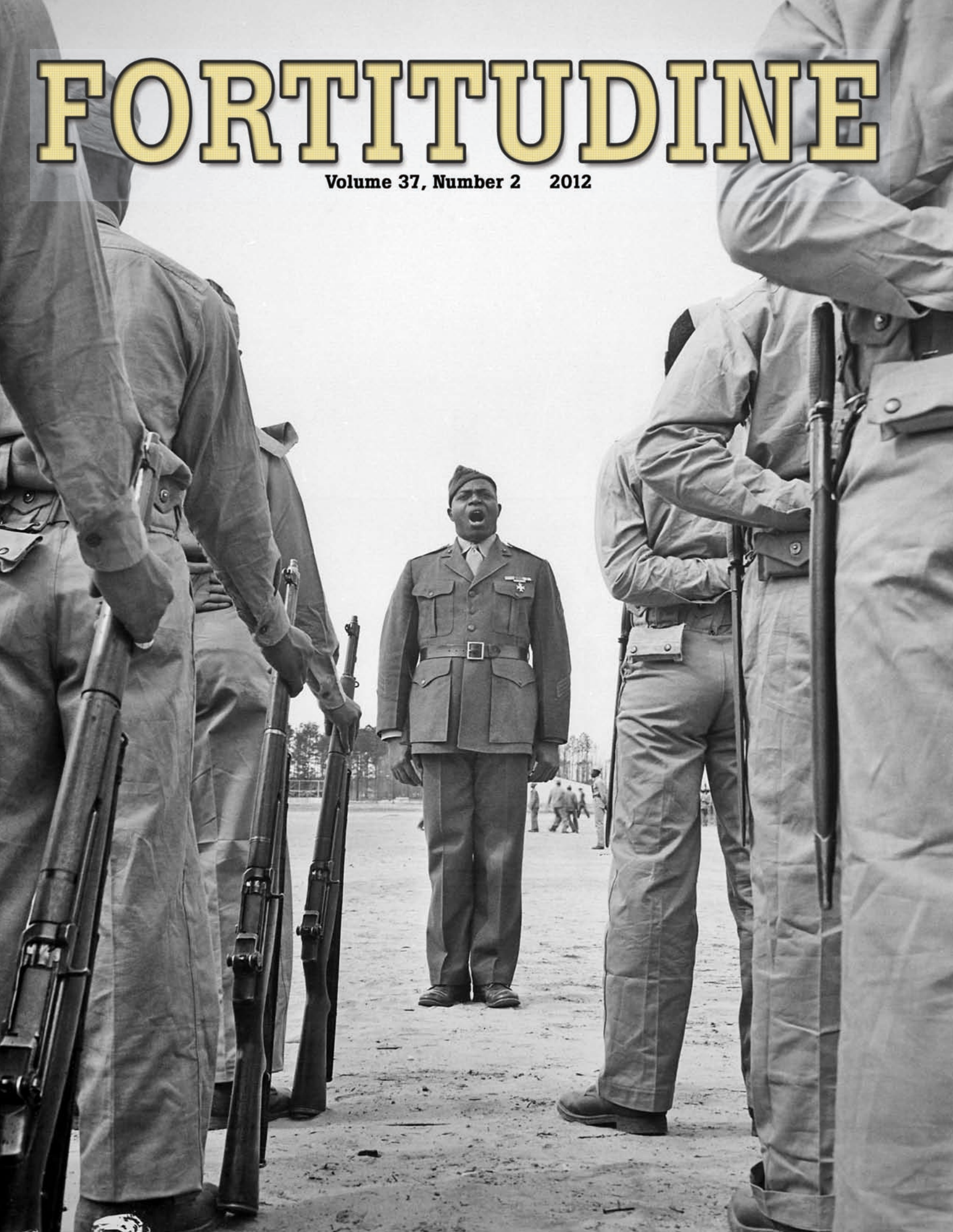


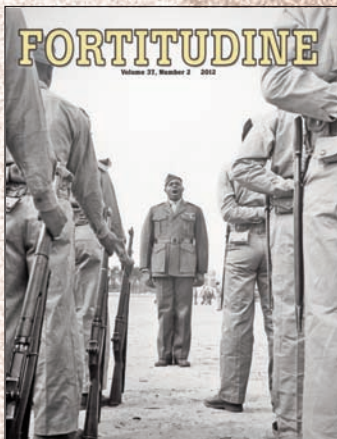
FORTITUDINE

Volume 37, Number 2 2012



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About the Cover:

Recruits listen to their drill instructor, Sgt Gilbert H. “Hashmark” Johnson, whose job was to create Marines during training at Montford Point Camp, North Carolina, 1943.

Inside Cover Art:

John Fabion sketched this charcoal rendering of a Montford Point Marine in the Pacific, 1944.

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This bulletin of the Marine Corps historical program is published for Marines, at the rate of one copy for every nine on active duty, to provide education and training in the uses of military and Marine Corps history. Other interested readers may purchase single copies or four-issue subscriptions from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office.

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PCN 104 012 20100

Giants Among the Marine Corps

By Dr. Charles P. Neimeyer
Director of Marine Corps
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On 27 June 2012, the Marines of Montford Point received recognition from the federal government when they were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal—the highest civilian recognition that Congress can bestow. The Congressional Gold Medal requires at least 67 cosponsors to even be considered on the floor of the Senate, and the Montford Point Marines, like the Navaho Code Talkers before them, were easily able to achieve this number. More than 400 surviving Montford Point Marines received invitations to the award event held in Washington, DC, and the medal itself will be preserved in perpetuity at the National Museum of the Marine Corps.

A second effort to recognize the sacrifice and contributions of the Montford Point Marines is being spearheaded by the Montford Point Marine Association. The Association is planning to create a National Montford Point Marine Monument. The monument should be completed later this year. Both the Congressional Medal and the forthcoming national monument will go far toward emblazoning the legacy of the Montford Point Marines into the historical memory of the Marine Corps and the nation as a whole.

In 1942, in response to a Presidential Executive Order by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to provide African Americans an

opportunity to serve as United States Marines, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Major General Thomas Holcomb, who had previously resisted the enlistment of African Americans, established a segregated boot camp, colocated near the newly established Marine Corps base, Camp Lejeune. Called Montford Point back then for its geographic location on the New River, it was later renamed in honor of legendary Marine drill instructor, Sergeant Major Gilbert H. “Hashmark” Johnson. The first recruits arrived at the newly established camp on 26 August 1942. Many of the Montford Point Marines remarked that once their trains reached Washington, DC, and points south, things took on an especially ominous cast for them. This was especially shocking for those African Americans who did not hail from the then deeply segregated South.

Nevertheless, these men made history. They were the first African American Marines since the American Revolution, and more than 20,000 men passed through the Montford Point program before it was discontinued in 1949. But what many did not realize at the time was that the vast majority of the Montford Point Marines were being prepared for a combat role. With the notable exception of the Army, the tradition in the Navy was to assign their African American recruits to non-combat roles. However, the Montford Point recruits were initially destined to form the 51st Defense Battalion (Composite). This organization was

to be commanded by white officers but would form a nearly exclusively black combat unit for the very first time in Marine Corps history. By 1943, and largely due to the greater number of African Americans going through training at Montford Point, the decision was made to create a second unit, the 52d Defense Battalion.



The defense battalions were first formed in 1939. The idea was that Marines needed forces for both mobile offensive operations and fixed defensive ones. Thus the defense battalions were large, heavily armed formations that included 5-inch naval gun batteries, 155mm artillery, antiaircraft defense weapons, searchlights and radar detachments, and a large number of machine-gun units. The defense battalions were also required to provide for their own local defense and had at least one rifle company reinforced available for this purpose.

After the 52d Defense Battalion had been formed, the pace of the war was such that the defense battalions were no longer necessary, and this type of battalion was the last of its kind before all of them were disestablished at war's end. Later arrivals to Montford Point were formed into independent units such as the ammunition and depot companies. While on the surface it appears that once again institutional big-

otry had won out over allowing African Americans a direct combat role, these men discovered at places like Saipan, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa, that they were among the first ashore.

Both the 51st and 52d Defense Battalions were deployed to the Pacific. The 51st Battalion was initially sent to the long-bypassed Ellice Islands but was moved up to Eniwetok and Kwajalein atolls by mid-1945. This battalion was never placed in areas where its combat skills might have been truly tested. However, the 52d Battalion had the advantage of lessons learned from the earlier experience of its sister Montford Point battalion. It was eventually sent to Guam, which although declared “secure,” still had numerous pockets of armed Japanese diehard resistors roaming the island. For example, Sergeant Ezra Kelly led several aggressive patrols in the backcountry, and he was credited with killing six Japanese soldiers, one of whom he took out just 1,000 yards from his battalion base camp. Sergeant Major Gilbert Johnson, at that time the sergeant major of the 52d Defense Battalion, had the opportunity to observe Kelly in action and commented that he was “absolutely fearless.”



Numerous Montford Point-trained combat-service-support companies also had the distinction of seeing significant combat. At one point during the war, the Montford Point boot camp was producing one ammunition company and three depot companies per month and continued to do so until October 1945—a full month after the war had officially ended. These particular companies saw action on Saipan and went ashore with the assault elements of the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions. The Montford Point Marines fought Japanese infiltrators and simultaneously unloaded ships under direct fire and at times found themselves fighting as infantry, once again proving the truth of the saying, “every Marine a rifleman.” On Guam, Marine Private Luther Woodard of the 4th Ammunition Company discovered six Japanese holdouts lurking in the vicinity of the ammo dump. Following some fresh tracks, Woodard engaged the enemy at close range, killing one soldier before the others fled. Returning to camp, he organized a patrol of five other men and went back and reengaged the enemy survivors in close combat, killing at least two more Japanese soldiers. For his courage and coolness under fire, Private Woodard was awarded the Silver Star by the Secretary of the Navy.

During the vicious fighting that took place on Peleliu, and Iwo Jima, the ammunition and depot companies were hit especially hard. For example, on Peleliu, the 11th Depot Company had 17 men wounded in action—the highest casualty rate suffered by an African American unit in the Pacific. Nearly all African

American Marines assigned to the V Amphibious Corps at Iwo Jima went ashore on D-Day. On Iwo Jima, where “uncommon valor was a common virtue,” Private James M. Whitlock was awarded the Bronze Star for his actions against the enemy.

This edition of *Fortitudine* is dedicated to the memory of the Montford Point Marines. Words cannot express the debt of gratitude the nation owes these men who persevered through the segregation and racism of 1940s America in order to serve their country in the cause of liberty and freedom for all. It is important for today’s Marines to remember their service and sacrifice. Many of the Montford Point Marines went on to rich careers in civilian life, becoming captains of industry, presidents of colleges and universities, or leaders in the civil rights movement that took place in America following World War II. Others remained on active duty in the Marine Corps and repeatedly broke through racial barriers. Regardless of whether they continued in the service or got out to start another career in the civilian world, these men were giants, and it is upon their shoulders that today’s Marines stand.



**“THAT WAS THE START OF MY BECOMING A MAN”:
ORAL HISTORIES OF MONTFORD POINT MARINES**



Photo by Sgt Ben Flores

By Anthony R. Taglianetti, *Oral Historian*, and Maj Robert F. Williams III, *Field Historian*

During the meetings between the Commandant and the History Division's Director, Dr. Charles P. Neimeyer, in late July 2011, the director was informed by the Commandant that he was going to honor the Montford Point Marines at their upcoming association's yearly

reunion from 25–28 August. This was one of the preliminary events in an ongoing effort directed by General James F. Amos to embrace the Montford Point Marines and their heritage, and to recognize their service with the bestowal of the Congressional Gold Medal. The Commandant

expressed a desire for the Montford Point Marines to attend a number of Marine ceremonies in their honor, and for the oral histories of every Montford Point Marine to be captured.

While collecting the oral histories was an important component of this effort, the greater chal-

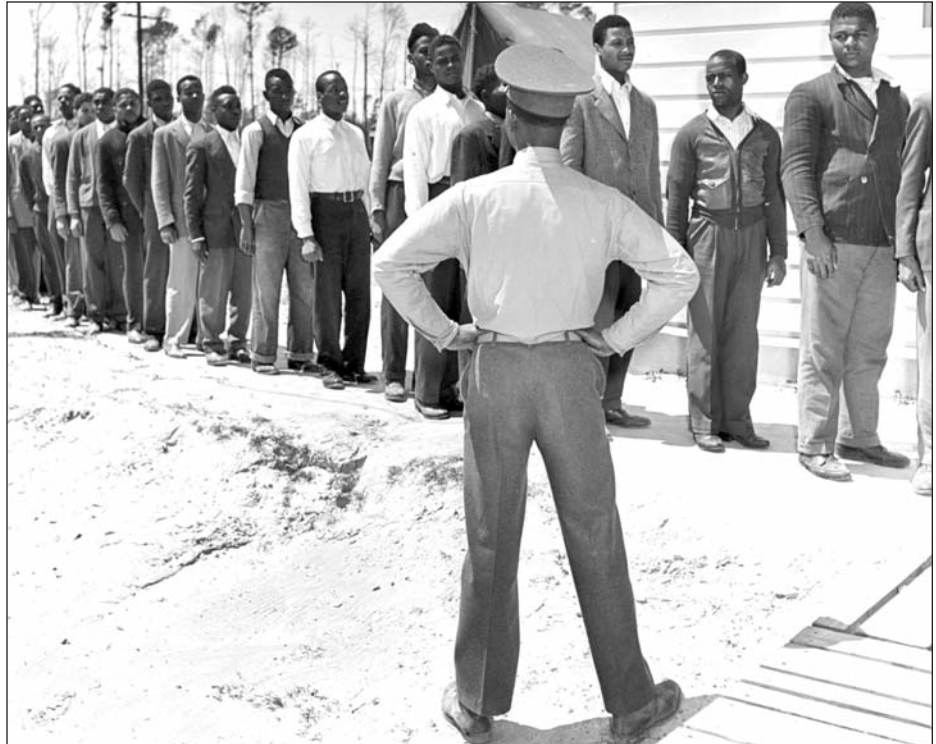
lenge was how to maximize the Montford Point Marines' participation at scheduled events. While this type of support request was not entirely unique and was within the capabilities of the History Division's staff, the time available for getting resources in place was very short, and as such, the requirements quickly outpaced what resources were immediately available.

Supporting this type of event is an excellent example of how the oral and field historians are transitioning from collecting stories about the Global War on Terrorism, which has dominated the collection efforts for well over a decade. What follows are excerpts from these interviews.

LEROY A. MACK

Mack: I was born March 29, 1929, in Brooklyn, New York. I was raised there in Brooklyn . . . What really got me in the Marine Corps was I saw a young man, his name was Richie Mayhew. Richie had just come back from overseas, and he was in his dress blues. That was the first time I ever saw a black Marine. And I was enthralled with that beautiful blue uniform. And he was tall, good looking, and he should have been a poster Marine. But anyway, I went to 90 Church Street, to sign up.

When we were on the train, there was only five of us, but there must have been 20 or 30 white Marines, all white guys going to Parris Island. So we were comparing orders, like theirs was saying Parris Island and mine was saying Montford Point, and I'm saying, "Where's Montford Point" because the furthest south I had



Marine Corps photo
New recruits starting their first day at Montford Point under the watchful eye of their drill instructor.

ever been was Jersey City. So I didn't know where North Carolina was, or anything else.

We got on the train, and we were playing and having a good time. Then when we got to Washington, DC, the Pullman porter came in and he says, "You five guys come with me." I said, "So where are we going?" He said, "You have crossed the Mason-Dixon Line." Well, it didn't mean anything to me. I didn't know what the Mason-Dixon Line was.

So when . . . the porter told us that, it floored me, because I really had never experienced anything like that. All right, we continued by train to Lumberton, North Carolina, . . . and they put us off the train in the middle of the night. And we sat there at the train station, and we kind of walked around. Finally, the sheriff drove up, and he said, "What are you boys doing out here at this time of night?" And we said,

"We're waiting on the bus to go to Camp Lejeune." "Oh, you're going to join the Marines, huh?" So he "Well, you stay here, don't move, and the bus will come." And sure enough, about four o'clock, the bus did come.

So as we progressed down the road, some white people begin to get on, and they didn't say anything . . . And finally, this woman got on, and she says, "Come on with me to the back of the bus." And I said, "I'm not going back there. Why should I go back there? Come on."

And that's when the bus driver stopped, and he said, "You see that sign back there? It read 'Blacks shall occupy the back of the bus to the front. Whites shall occupy the front to the back.'" Well, that's when we got the message. And we got there in the back, and we rolled on.

We got to Jacksonville. That was another, what do you call,



another shock, because we were supposed to have transportation to Montford Point. But there was none. And the MPs were there at the bus station, and they—we asked them, “Is there transportation to take us to Montford Point?” They said, “No, you’re going to have to walk” . . . So we said, “Okay.” So sure enough, we found Montford Point.

So we went to the admin building, we walked in, and there was this clerk named Hill. And Hill told us, “There’s the sergeant major’s office right there.” So we went in, and there was nobody in there. And Oscar Lee Flow Jr. sat in Sergeant Major Johnson’s chair. And we stood around the rest of the room.

The sergeant major came in, and he looked up, and he saw Flow in his chair, and all at once I knew that I was in the wrong place because that man said some curse words I never heard of. That man was so mad, he grabbed Flow and threw Flow out of the chair against the wall, and he told us to stand at attention.

And I knew then and there I had made a mistake. I knew I needed to be in the Army or the Navy somewhere. I surely didn’t

need to be in this. But anyway, we got processed.

Finally we got a group, enough to form a section. And that’s when we went to the PX. For \$25, you got a bucket, a scrub brush, a bar of yellow soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, and a haircut. Well, I had that nice pomade. And the barber said, “How do you like this?” And I said just take a little off the side. He said, “okay,” zoom, zoom, zoom. And I said, “Man, look what you did.” He said, “Don’t worry about it. I’ll fix it.” Zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom. “Next.” Lord, I was as bald-headed as I don’t know what. And that was my introduction to Montford Point. From there on out, it was serious business because our drill instructors, it was like they didn’t want us. They did everything to try to discourage us. “You need to go home, you don’t need to be here”—and they would call you all kinds of bad names, and they would talk about your parents. And there were a couple of days there that I cried at night. I did not want to be there. But through it all, we stuck together, and we made it. And that was the start of my becoming a man because I began to take responsibilities on my own.

ERNEST SMITH

Q: How did you find out the Marine Corps was hiring, that they were taking African Americans?

Smith: Oh, it was in the papers. You know, you got the news there. I said, “I know I have to go into the service. I’m going to go into the best and get the best training I can to protect myself and to fight for my country.” I went in there. I went to Montford Point.

Q: Can we talk about your interaction with the recruiter? What did you say to the recruiter? What did he tell you about the Marine Corps?

Smith: When I went to the recruiting station, I went to the Marine Corps recruiting part of the station, and they said nothing. They gave me some tests and a physical, and then they assigned me to the Marines. I didn’t know it was segregated at that time. I was really taken aback when we got to the southern station in Washington DC, and had to go from one part of the train to the other. I got no inkling from the recruiter of what I was getting into, other than I was accepted as a recruit, and off I went.

Q: What were your impressions of Montford Point?

Smith: I accepted it because this is what I was assigned to, but I was very bitter. The white Marines went into nice, beautiful, clean barracks. We went into huts, square huts. I remember saying, “I expect if I go overseas, I would not be living in splendor . . . but here in the States?” Montford Point itself was good in terms of training because every morning, as I said, we would go out for calisthenics and chow, then we would fix up the hut, and off we went for the day. Sometimes we didn’t come back until late at night. It was interesting. When we were overseas, the company had our own cooks. I’d see them out cooking. I said to one of the cooks, who was stripped to the waist (this is when we were overseas), “Look at all the flies in there.” He said, “You wanted fresh meat, there you got it!” He just kept stirring. The meals were very potent in terms

of vitamins and what not, but I would never go to a restaurant and order it, that's for sure!

Q: How did you feel about having African American drill instructors?

Smith: Oh, I thought it was great! When I was assigned to this company, the 23d Marine Depot Company, we had four officers, all white. The commanding officer was a first lieutenant, and all the rest were second lieutenants. I'll tell you, there is only one officer, who I keep in touch with today, that was anything civil. The commanding officer was a lawyer. They had him in general headquarters handling court-martials and what not, so he was hardly ever there. Once in a while he would come down and take the whole company out. We would march about five miles and back, and then he's off. The one thing that really soured us with him was this: one day he came down, and we were playing baseball, so we were divided up by sides. He came out with something, "Eeny meeny, miny, moe, catch a — by his toe." That did it. When he said that, the whole company did about face and went back to the barracks. He didn't realize what he was saying, or the impact of what he was saying to us. Miles Q. Romney was his name. I will always remember that. There was another, a second lieutenant that was from the south, and he was fairly decent. Then there was one from New Jersey, a Princeton graduate. There were officers that were just out of Officer Candidate School. I don't know why they picked them. John A. Myers Jr. was the one that we felt was extremely good.



I was assigned to a depot company. It's interesting. I got my orders one night, and the next morning I had to go board a train and head to California to the Pacific. I spent my time in the Pacific. Hawaii was the first stop, which was nice. Then we went on to Guam and the Marshall Islands. We came into the port harbor. At that time, the Japanese had pulled a banzai attack. The Marines that were there, the 1st Provisional Brigade, were sent up to the capital of Guam. We were pushed into this harbor there with an Army company or battalion (I don't know which). The fighting was so fierce that they had to bring part of the brigade back from the attack on the capital. When that was over, we set up camp there when the island was secure. That was it until our next . . . we went through the Marshall Islands, some of the islands there. It was interesting, when I was at Montford Point, the 51st Defense Battalion was organized and trained. They were good. When I got to the Marshall Islands, they were sitting around in their tents doing nothing. They weren't used at all! They said, "What are we

here for, just to sit and sleep?" Anyway, we left there. I'll try to recall where we went. Oh, we went back to Guam, and we were stationed there until our next assignment, which was Iwo Jima. We went in there about three or four days after the initial attack, and we were only down by the harbor, but the men had to supply the division that was up fighting. They got caught up in that when they were delivering the supplies. After that, the island was secured, and we were back to Guam.

Q: You had mentioned when you got to the Marshall Islands, and you talked about the 51st not being used at all. How did you feel about that?

Smith: Oh, very, very poor. In talking with them, they didn't even want to talk to us because they see us come over there, and we were a depot company, which was typical in terms of the African American use in services. Men went out and did a lot of carrying of equipment and what not. It was hot lying in the tents. I remember we were on this island, Perry Island, and Bob Hope came over and put on a show. We were segregated. The black Marines were up on a hill, and Bob Hope and his performers were down below. We could see them and hear them, but that was it. We never got anywhere close. They would go around talking to the other white Marines that were there. That was a disappointment.

Q: Then you went back to Guam, and you were at Iwo Jima as your depot company role, or did you get involved in the fight?

Smith: Well, the depot company fought the same as any other company because they had to. If



Photo by Sgt Ben Flores

Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen James F. Amos poses with Col Stephanie C. Smith and her father, Earnest Smith, during a reception honoring the Montford Point Marines at Marine Barracks Washington on 26 August 2011.

you're taking trucks in with supplies and you're attacked by the Japanese, you're going to have to defend them.

Q: How did you feel about that? You finally had your chance to fight?

Smith: Oh, good, but still not enough.

Q: Why not enough?

Smith: Because we were way back there. When we got up to the front lines, believe it or not, the white Marines received us with pleasure. They would talk with us. "Glad to see you!" They knew what it was like, and they knew that we came to help, but that was as far as it went.

Q: Did you find that the attitude changed beyond just the battlefield?

Smith: No. When we came back, we were all in different areas. The white Marines went to their base, and we stayed at Montford Point.

Q: How do you feel about the Marine Corps?

Smith: I'll tell you, I have a lot of

good memories. There was nothing I could do about segregation other than in my way, in terms of voting and society, go along with what we had. After they fully desegregated the Marine Corps, I met a lot of Marines that were there when I was there but came through this, and they had beautiful barracks, the same as the whites. It was nice.

Q: How do you feel about your daughter joining the Marine Corps?

Smith: I was very proud.

Q: Do you feel that you helped pave her way?

Smith: Well, I think her listening to my stories, she probably got the hint that I liked the Marine Corps after I was out of it. She got her promotion as a second lieutenant in Goshen, New York, in my daughter's yard in the back. We had two officers that came in; one was a major and the other was a lieutenant or a captain. Anyway, we had two officers who came down who inducted her into the

Marine Corps. I'll tell you though, I was proud because every time I'd see her she'd be up another rank, from second lieutenant to first lieutenant to captain to major and now colonel.

Q: Do you have any final thoughts on your time in the Marine Corps?

Smith: No, I jokingly say I'd reup now! No problem! If any of my children or grandchildren wanted to go in, I would support them fully.

STANLEY PORTER

Q: So you must have been one of the first Marines then, black Marines sent to Montford Point?

Porter: I was among the first. I think the first came in a little ahead of me. Let's see, counting the various platoons, I was the 18th platoon, so they had from one up to 18. And of course, the famous people that we know about, Huff and Johnson, they had just finished. I think they finished in the 15th or the 16th.

Q: How did you know that the Marines were now accepting blacks?

Porter: Oh, it was advertised all on the radio. We didn't have television at that time, but it was on the radio and in the newspapers. And at that time, we thought that it was a marvelous opportunity. You know, the eagerness of most of us as blacks, we were eager to break the barriers. We thought if we broke the barriers, we could make a better life for ourselves and our families and the race as a whole. I think . . . that was one thing that stood in your mind, whatever you did, whatever you do each and every day of your life, you have a dedication to progress

for the black community. No matter what you did, it had to be in progress for the black community.

Q: And when you got off the truck [at Montford Point], what was the process to get you from being a civilian to getting on that path to becoming a Marine?

Porter: I think the word was that now that you're here, you don't say "yes" and "no," you say "yes sir." With the harsh voices, the commanding voices, the tones of almost death ringing in your soul, you know, you were told that you were here to obey and you were lucky. You were lucky to be in this service, and of course, all of those were white that were saying it.

Q: So were your drill instructors white Marines then at that stage?

Porter: Yes, all white. Let's see, the blacks who were promoted at the time were PFC. That was the highest rank on the base as blacks.

Q: What else do you remember about the training there? What kinds of things did you do during boot camp to prepare you for the war?

Porter: Constant drill, constant drill when we got up in the morning. [The drill instructor] would say, "When I say 'outside,' you should be here." And that was the way we followed, and we were in these little huts. And of course, when we would fall out, you know, through that little door, that wasn't fast enough. He would march you back and forth from time to time, that was a punishment in order to get outside. Either you'd come with your sea bag and your rifle, always with your rifle, and after that, your locker box. I can remember a time that we didn't get out early



enough, we went through the wall. Discipline, I think in the Marine Corps, there is no other military organization in the world that has the discipline of the Marine Corps, and I think that became a part of our lives, and I think that was part of the thirst for perfection that we just endured. The only thing was we hated whoever was giving it to us.

Q: What was your sense of the attitude of the rest of the Marine Corps toward you, the early first black Marines? Was there a sense that you were being welcomed into the institution, or was there resistance?

Porter: No, there was a definite overcast that you were not welcome. As a matter of fact, before we left, one of the most damaging speeches that we heard was from Major General [Henry L.] Larsen, who had just come back from overseas, and as he came into our camp to make this speech. He was standing in a big boxing ring, I was standing right under it. I guess maybe there was five to seven hundred of us there at that time, and he said the part of the speech that I really remember was, he said, "They've made many

changes since I was stateside, they've added the woman, they've added the dogs . . . and when I came into this camp and saw you people wearing our globe and anchor, I knew there was a war on." Those remarks were instilled into my total soul, and I had hoped that somehow, this would be eliminated, and I've known the fulfillment of these kind of changes into the direction of freedom, and I said, "My God, the fulfillment is here." And today was a thrilling adventure, you know, to see the women . . . the dogs . . . and the black officers.

Q: For you and others you spoke with, what was the reaction when you heard comments like that? Did it inspire you to earn acceptance, or how did you respond internally?

Porter: I think we resented it, but we had to make him out to be a liar, and I think our effort was twofold, to be even better than we even thought we could be.

GENE DOUGHTY

Q: What were your duties at Montford Point?

Doughty: I was fortunate enough, with some of the experience that I had, to be sent to headquarters company. So I learned basically administrative know-how. I think we all know what the muster roll is that had to be kept up to date. And every serviceman had his service record book. And I did that very well, until there was a need for corporals and sergeants in the field. I liked the idea of going into the field. It meant another promotion, and it meant travel, which I dearly love. And in another six months there, I found myself as a corporal, and I took

over a squad and then deployed to the 5th Marine Division.

Q: Describe landing on Iwo Jima on D-Day. What do you recall?

Doughty: It would take a book. Sometimes I call it the indescribable. There were a lot of dangerous and perilous ways and things that developed. First of all, the waves that were coming in against the banks, they were ferocious and sometimes covered you up. There were many people who drowned there because of the type of waves that we had. We had men that were shot or either hurt and couldn't help themselves there, and as a consequence, they were eaten by all types of sea life that was floating in the water.

Again, there were so many things I could think of right now, some that I don't care to admit. It was very unpleasant to say the least. You know, I was scared. Remember now, I'm 19 years of age going on 20. To face warfare in that manner, sometimes you think that you're going to go into shock . . . that you're going to go into the hospital there with a damaged brain. Anything could happen; you're thinking about the worst things.

But I prevailed, and there I was about the 19th day on the island, my squad was put on guard duty. We had a huge ammo dump, and I mean a huge one because we were about to go into an occupied area, and we needed a lot of ammo. Just maybe a few yards away was a huge bivouac area where Army, Navy, and Marine Corp personnel were billeted. And then of course, there was the airfield. The Japanese had three airfields on which to land there. Only one was operational. So the Japanese



decided that was what they wanted. They wanted to go into that area and commit as much action as they possibly could, and kill as many flying men that they could. So that was the last desperate attack by the Japanese on Iwo Jima. I don't see how it was possible for us to fire our arms with such amazing skill, because you couldn't see anybody. It was dark. I mean nobody dared to light a cigarette. There were no candles burning. It was just pitch black.

But yet we were able to fire our rifles, and then of course they fired when the Japanese fired their weapons, they would get a good idea of where they were located. And from out of that there were about a half a dozen, two of my squad, that earned both the Silver Star and the Bronze Star.

CHARLES PAYNE

Q: Sir, tell us about yourself.

Payne: Well, my name is Charles Payne, as you just said. I was born in Orangeburg, South Carolina. I was raised by a great grandmother and a great grandfather. My great grandfather was with the

55th Massachusetts Regiment, Company C, and he was a sergeant.

Q: And that was during the Civil War?

Payne: During the Civil War, yes. Now, he died in 1930. The year that he died, I was going to be five years old that October, and he died in July of 1930. The thing that I remember about him is that he would walk me down Russell Street to see the steam locomotive. This is what I can remember about him. And my grandmother passed, and I had to go, leave Orangeburg, to go live with my mother and stepfather in Connecticut. When I got to Connecticut, the battle of Guadalcanal was going on. Guadalcanal really impressed me because it was a lot of action. There was a lot of action in the newspapers on it.

The day that I was drafted [January 1944], there was 110 draftees, and the recruiter was saying, "You, over there—Army, you, over there—Navy, you, over here—Army, you over here—Navy." And this is the way it was going. And when he got to me, he said I was Navy. And I raised my hand and said, "Sir, may I have the Marine Corps?" He hesitated, and he said, "Okay, over there."

I learned one thing: ask for what you want. Take what you can get. Use what you got until you can get what you want. And the good book says seek and ye shall find. Ask and it shall be given to you. Knock and the door will be opened. I might have it a little twisted around here. But if you put it in order and follow it, it will work for you. Be as humble as you can and respectful. That's

what I try to do. That's what I was trained to do.

[After boot camp] I had a furlough. I was walking to the school in my home town of Bridgeport, Connecticut. And this fellow came down off his pole, off the telephone pole. And he says, "You're in the Marines?" I said, "Yeah." He says, "When did they start taking colored people in the Marines?" He just wanted to know some history about it because he was shocked.

[Payne served his enlistment on Hawaii working in supply billets.]

Q: How did your time in the Marine Corps end?

Payne: I left by choice. And after I left the Marine Corps, the one thing we, you know, we had, we had very good officers that really taught us well. And there was one thing I remember in discharging. This officer said, "You made it as Marines. We're all one in this unit. But when you get out there, you're going to be separated." He says, "You're going out there. Out there you're called a Negro, and you'll be a minority. So it means that you will have to fight hard." He said,

"But it's like a ball game; although you may have two strikes against you, you're going to hit a home run." So that was encouraging, very encouraging.

Q: Did your time in the Marine Corps help you with your future careers?

Payne: It certainly did. It helped me because first, you know, I was a humble person and also I was an aggressive person. I would try to do things that I wanted to do [even though] there were a lot of obstacles. First of all, I wanted to become a radio announcer, and I went to radio broadcasting school and they said, well, we can't guarantee you a job. So I said, well, I want to go anyway. [After graduation] I wrote letters to different radio stations and I got a job. But I didn't stop there. I got into direct sales and I was the only black guy in the unit.

OSCAR CULP

Q: When and where were you born?

Culp: I was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, on May 13, 1924. My mother told me when I left home that (I was just one of three children, I was the oldest; the other two passed away), "If you want to do well in the military, son, you do whatever they tell you to do and do it when they tell you to do it. Don't question them, just do it." I tried to remember that. At boot camp, they marched us down to this building and started feeding us. I didn't know if you had to pay for your food or anything. I saw them give you this metal tray, and then you go down . . . I looked down at the end, and I didn't see any cash registers or nothing. When I got down there, they didn't ask for their

money. I thought, "Boy this is pretty good! Really!"

When I went to boot camp, I think I had cardboard in the bottom of my shoes. They were all worn out. When we got down there, we had this whole big bag full of all new clothing and new shoes and everything. I think, "God, this is all right!" Really to top it off, after we were there for maybe four or five weeks, they called us out again. They were paying us money! I thought it was mad! They gave us a place to sleep. They give us free food. They give us free clothing. And then they pay us on top of that! Oh my goodness, this place is all right!

Q: Tell me about the people that recruited you? How did you hear that the Marines were taking African Americans?

Culp: I was standing there one day looking at the sign, and somebody, I don't know who it was, but they came up to me and said, "Hey, you know they're accepting African Americans in the Marine Corps?" It was my opportunity to get away from Charlotte, and I preferred the Marine Corps because they say that they were the best fighting unit in the world, and I wanted to fight. I wanted to fight to create more equal opportunities for all people, really. That's what got me in, I guess.

Q: What year did you join?

Culp: May of 1943.

Q: What unit were you assigned to?

Culp: Well, I was in what they called depots. They didn't have the African Americans divided into 1st Marine Division, 2d Division, etc. I was in the depot, more or





less a supporting unit; the working units. We did work.

Q: What depot company?

Culp: The 7th Depot Company. We went overseas. First we stopped in Samoa. We stayed there for several months. From there, we went to a little island in the Pacific Ocean.

Q: What was your mission on that island?

Culp: A lot of the equipment that was being damaged up with the combat units, all the equipment that would get shot up and messed up, they would ship it back to us, and we would put it on board another ship and bring it back to the States. We were there for maybe 18 months to two years. One thing I want to point out that maybe had something to do with my duties, when I got out of boot camp, normally you're a private. Well, I was promoted to corporal and I was an NCO, and usually I was the highest ranking NCO in my outfits . . . in all the outfits that I was in. I was in charge of the brig on the island.

Q: So you went to Hawaii after that?

Culp: Yes, I went to Hawaii. We

made pallets to ship things overseas. From there, we went back to Montford Point and stayed there for a short while. From there, we went to Saipan. Our job on Saipan was security over the Japanese that had been captured.

Q: What years were you there on Saipan?

Culp: Maybe 1946 or 1947. They were still coming out of the hills. From Saipan we went to Guam. At Guam, I was sent to school. They called it Modern Firefighter School. I became a fire chief about two years. I lived it like a religion.

I worked every day, seven days a week. They had fires every day!

Q: How were the fires starting?

Culp: There were no buildings. It was stuff that was shipped back that had been damaged in the war. They were shipped back and covered with these big tarpaulins. You know, in Guam it gets pretty hot. I would have to send out two engines in different ways at one time; really! And I'm just a little 21-year-old guy at the time, but I was in charge of the fire department.

Q: What's one story about a white Marine that you were put in charge of maybe early on that you had a problem with or one that stands out about how you had to overcome the barrier.

Culp: Well, not at Camp Lejeune, but this was late, like in 1961. I was the planner accounting chief at that time at Camp Pendleton, California. And I was in the accounting section, and they'd never had a black staff NCO in charge of that section. Word got back to the colonel that some of the people were complaining or something. So he called me up to his office and said, "Sergeant

Culp, I've checked your records," so on and so on. He says, "If you have any problem at all with any of those people down in that office," he says, "you just let me know, just let me know, any of them, let me know." Well, I served there for six years. I never had a minute's problem out of anyone.

THEODORE R. BRITTON JR.

Q: What was your most memorable experience out of boot camp?

Britton: The most memorable experience is something that I'm hesitant to talk about. The first thing we did when we arrived at Guadalcanal was to build a latrine. Now, you don't build a latrine if you're going into battle, but suffice it to say the sergeant had the people to build a latrine. He built it up the hill. This was great for awhile until a few months later the monsoon season started, and rain started pouring down the hill. So at the dark of midnight, this sergeant had us fall out with buckets and shovels. I always think back to him, as he was yelling out because I've heard Churchill's Blood, Sweat, and Tears, MacArthur's, I shall return. But to my dying day, I'll always remember that sergeant yelling (we were supposed to dig a trench leading away from the latrine); I will always remember that sergeant yelling, "Hurry man! It's gaining on us!" And he didn't say "it's" either.

Q: Could you talk about what it was like to serve in a segregated unit? What was your treatment like?

Britton: Well, in a sense, you know, it wasn't that much different because having grown up in a segregated environment, you take a lot of things for granted. It becomes a way of life until you experience something different and you see benefits different from that, and you begin to challenge it.

Q: When World War II came to an end, what was life like as a black Marine?

Britton: In Hawaii, it was a great experience. I learned a lot about Hawaii and about Hawaiians and Hawaiian language. I had a unique experience. In November, that's usually a great feast day in the Marine Corps. It's the Marine Corps birthday, so needless to say, the food is extra good, but for some reason I decided to go down to the county seat for Maui at that time, and I remember going into a restaurant where the waiter was in a tuxedo. The table had linen on it, it had silver and crystal. I always remember that I ordered Muscovy duck and wine.

It was the first time that I had ever sat down at a real restaurant where I was served just like any other American. Even in New York, they were still discriminatory so that as a black person, you could not go into any of the restaurants, but here in Hawaii, I enjoyed the finest feast of my life. I have dined with kings, emperors, queens, prime ministers, ministers of government, mayors, governors, and even the president, but that was special. It was almost like crossing the Rubicon. Once you cross it, you don't go back. I've had a lot of things that I have enjoyed in terms of food and everything,

but being at the Maui Grand Hotel in 1945 as a young Marine dining in this fashion was exceptional to me.

Q: If you could talk to young African American men today about Montford Point, what would you say?

Britton: I am reminded that in 1967 to 1969, five African American Marines received the Congressional Medal of Honor. These are two of the most turbulent years in the history of the country. Cities were burning, people were upset because of the assassinations of Senator Kennedy and Dr. King. In 1943 and 1944, we African Americans were demanding the right to be on the battle lines to fight. Today young African American Marines don't have to ask that. Wherever their comrades go, they go, too. I would only say that those five African Americans that I mentioned who received the Congressional Medal of Honor, all gave their lives to save their fellow Marines. They don't say whether they are white or black or Spanish, you name it. They gave their lives to save their fel-



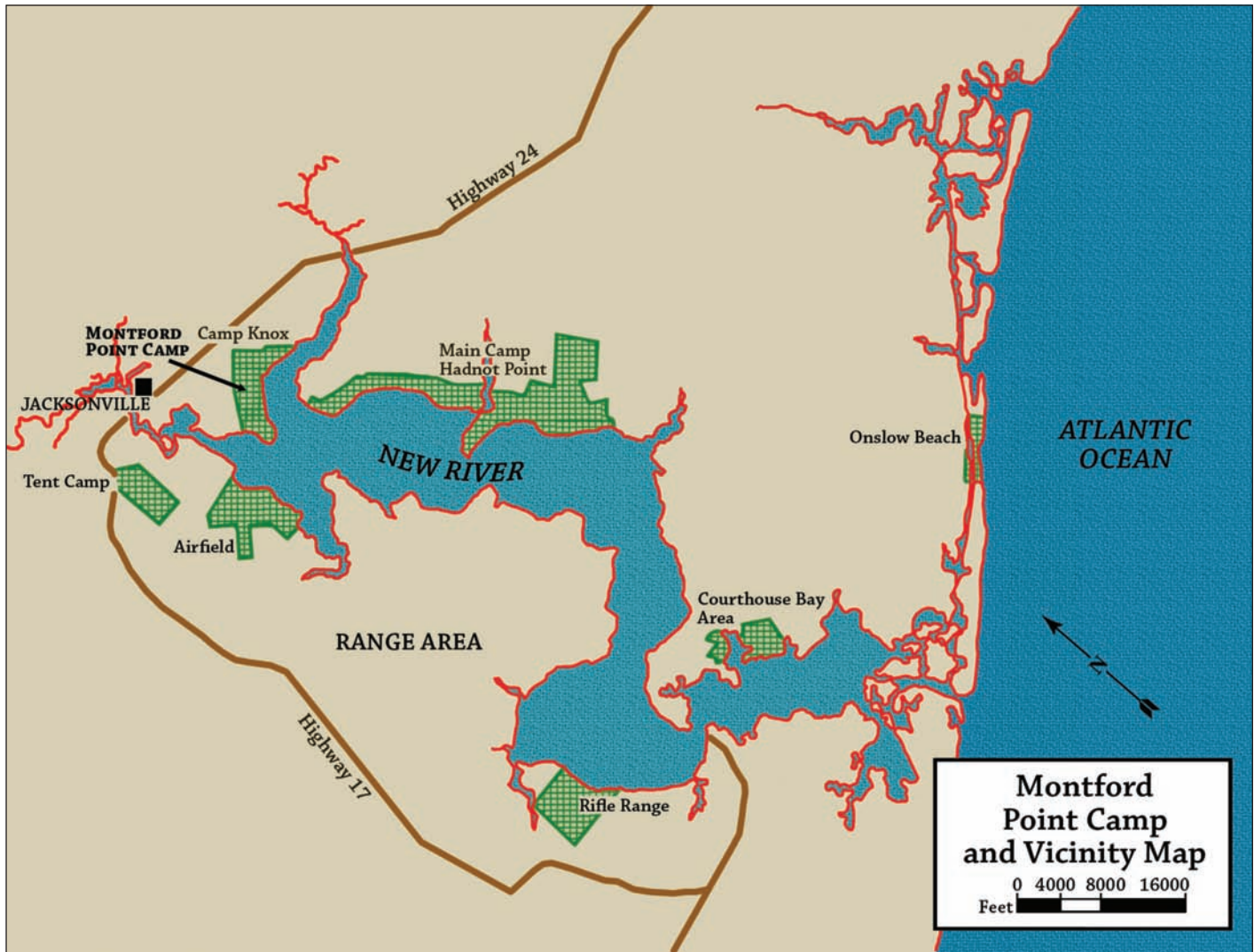
low Marines, and that's the way it should be today.

Q: In your opinion, how significant is Montford Point to the legacy of other black servicemen who came first?

Britton: I can say this: on Sunday, a week ago, by invitation, I was down at Turner Field in Atlanta for the Braves-Cubs game. At about the eighth inning, suddenly, the game was stopped. Pictures of me as a young Marine were flashed on the screens. They talked about my background, my biography, and with that, I was invited out on the field to wave to the group. I had my Montford Point cap on with the eagle, globe, and anchor. There may have been maybe 20,000 to 30,000 people in the stadium. They all stood up to applaud. Many of them came over afterwards to say thank you for your service. Youngsters came over asking if I could take a picture with them. Long after I was leaving the stadium, people were coming up to say hello. Now, coming out of segregated South Carolina years ago, and now to be in Atlanta and have 30,000 people standing up and applauding you and thanking you . . . it just did something to me.

Q: As you reflect over all of your achievements, how has the Marine Corps affected those achievements? What characteristics did the Marine Corps give you to help you accomplish those?

Britton: I guess what things have affected me as a Marine, I guess one could say that an article in the *Barbados Advocate*, I think it was, in 1976, probably expresses it most. It was a two-page article. . . and right in the middle of it,



Map by W. Stephen Hill

they talked about my erect military bearing, that it probably came from my years as a Marine, a member of the United States Marine Corps. Now why that should suddenly pop up, I never knew that I had any military bearing. I don't slouch, I hope, but by the same token, here the reporter, over the course of a two-page article, a very large article, takes note of the fact that the Marine Corps has affected how I walk, how I talk, how I act, and how I carry myself. Whenever I go abroad and I'm visiting an embassy, and I frequently do, one of the first things that I want to do is speak with the Marines, the Marine security guard.

I always say that the first eight years, if not all of my years, were some of the most glorious days of my life being in the Marine Corps. I was not in any battles, but at the

same time, I was growing educationally, mentally, physically, and so forth. I always look back on those days as some of the happiest days of my life.

How to Access History Division's Oral History Recordings and Transcripts

The History Division oral historians have video recordings of 55 of the Montford Point Marines, collected at the August 2011 annual meeting of the association in Washington DC. The oral historians also have transcripts of the video recordings. The collection also has PDF oral histories of eight Montford Point Marines dating back to 1972, including Sergeant Major Edgar Huff and Sergeant Major Gilbert H. "Hashmark" Johnson. Contact Rob Taglianetti at anthony.taglianetti@usmc.mil to request interview lists and information on obtaining audio recordings and transcripts.



Montford Point Marines

By BGen Edwin H. Simmons (Ret)

There were no known blacks in the Marine Corps when World War II began, and, in the prevailing ethos of the time, the Marine Corps wanted none. In January 1942, the Major General Commandant, Thomas Holcomb, had testified that “there would be a definite loss of efficiency in the Marine Corps if we have to take Negroes . . .” But President Franklin D. Roosevelt had created the Fair Employment Practices Commission in 1941 and had stated that the Armed Forces “shall lead the way in erasing discrimination over color or race.”

Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox overrode General Holcomb’s protests and decreed that enlistment of black Marines would begin on 1 June and that there would be a complete black Marine combat battalion.

A Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, study recommended that the blacks should serve in a messman’s branch similar to the Navy’s, but to meet Secretary Knox’s requirement that there be a combat battalion, it was decided that the required battalion could best be a defense battalion.

Colonel Samuel A. Woods, Jr., a graduate of The Citadel and a 25-year veteran with service in France in World War I and duty in Cuba, China, the Dominican Republic, and the Philippines, was chosen to form the new unit, it being supposed that a patrician South Carolinian would know how to handle blacks. He estimated that with a minimum of 1,000 reserve black recruits he could field a defense battalion in six months. Training was to be done at Mumford (later respelled “Montford”) Point at the new Marine base, soon to become Camp Lejeune, at New River, North Carolina. Construction of the Montford Point camp was budgeted at \$750,000. The camp was approached by a narrow mile-long road that turned off Highway 24 near Jacksonville and consisted chiefly of a headquarters building, chapel, theater, dispensary, mess hall, a small officers’ club, and 120 green prefabricated (“cardboard”) huts, each designed to billet 16 men.

Recruiting began, as required by Secretary Knox, on 1 June 1942, but black recruits were not immediately shipped to Montford Point. On 18 August a cadre of white officers and NCOs, with Colonel



Col Samuel A. Woods Jr.

Woods as commanding officer, activated the 51st Composite Defense Battalion. The best claim to being the first black to reach Montford Point seems to go to Howard P. Perry, of Charlotte, North Carolina, who arrived on 26 August. By September, three recruit platoons were

in being. The recruiting target was 1,200, but by the end of October, there were still fewer than 600 blacks in the camp.

The first drill instructors were white, with exceptional recruits being singled out as “Acting Jacks,” or assistant drill instructors. A sprinkling of recruits had previous military experience, including, most notably, Gilbert “Hashmark” Johnson, who, at the venerable age of 37, had behind him six years in the Army’s black 25th Regiment. More recently he had been an Officers’ Steward, 2d Class, in the Navy. He wangled a discharge so as to enlist in the Marine Corps as a private. Another of the first black drill instructors was Edgar R. Huff, who had a long career in the Marine Corps ahead of him.

The 51st was fairly well along on the way to having its ranks filled, when, on 5 December 1942, voluntary enlistments were halted for all the Services. Henceforth the call-up would be only through the Selective Service System with estimated 10 percent of those to be drafted up to be black. The Marine Corps, with an increase in strength of 99,000 authorized for 1943, would have to find a place for as many as 9,900 (eventually the number would approach 20,000) blacks, far more than the 1,200 planned for the 51st Defense Battalion. In January 1943 the first drafted Marines arrived at Montford Point. To absorb this influx, Secretary Knox authorized an all-black Messman Branch (later “Stewards Branch”), and a second defense battalion was contemplated.

Colonel Woods, as commander of an expanded camp, had his hands full. In March he relinquished command to Lieutenant Colonel W. Bayard Onley, Naval Academy 1919. Command of the Recruit Depot Battalion went to Lieutenant Colonel

Theodore A. Holdahl, a World War I enlisted Marine, and more recently Woods’ executive officer. A Messman Branch Battalion was organized under Captain Albert O. Madden, another World War I veteran.

Promotion opportunities for black Marines were both spelled out and circumscribed by confidential Letter of Instruction 421, issued by Major General Commandant Holcomb on 14 March 1943. Commanders were to exert every effort to locate blacks “having the requisite qualities of intelligence, education, and leadership to become noncommissioned officers.” At the same time, in no case would there be black noncommissioned officers senior to white Marines in the same unit, and it was desirable that few, if any, be of the same rank.

A new category of black Marine units, depot companies, was authorized. Depot companies, organized into two platoons, were to have three officers and 110 enlisted Marines. Minimally trained and armed only with rifles, carbines, and submachine guns, the depot companies were to serve as stevedores and cargo handlers. The 1st Depot Company, under Captain Jason M. Austin, Jr., was activated on 8 March. Three weeks after its organization, the 1st Depot Company was on its way by train to San Diego, where it embarked on 16 April in the destroyer USS *Hunt* (DD 674) for Noumea, New Caledonia, where it joined the 1st Base Depot.

Two depot companies a month were to be turned out by Montford Point. By the war’s end there would be 49 depot companies and they had expanded to three platoons with a total of 163 officers and men. In commenting on their minimal training, Sergeant Major Edgar Huff, who was the first sergeant of the 5th Depot Company after being field sergeant major of recruit training at Montford Point, years later observed wryly:

SgtMaj Gilbert H. “Hashmark” Johnson with Montford Point’s mascot and his trainer.

Marine Corps photo



But a depot company, all they needed was a strong back, so he already had that and so there was no use training him because that's all he was going to do, to load and unload ships and haul ammunition and supplies into the line for the fighting troops. Because the fighting troops, at that time, were all white Marines.

By May all the white drill instructors were gone from Montford Point, replaced by black sergeants and corporals, and late that month Sergeant "Hashmark" Johnson became the Recruit Battalion's field sergeant major, in charge of all drill instructors.

In September 1943 (by which time 10 depot companies had been formed and shipped) still another category of black Marine unit was created. These were the ammunition companies, designed to complement the all-white ordnance companies in the base and field depots, the World War II equivalent of today's Field Service Support Groups. The ammunition companies were big companies, eight officers and 251 enlisted men. Policy was to replace the white noncommissioned officers in the depot companies as quickly as possible, but the requirement to have technically qualified ordnance specialists and the workings of Letter of Instruction 421 kept black Marines in the ammunition companies from reaching the staff noncommissioned officer ranks. In September 1944 the final total of 12 ammunition companies was reached.

Earlier, in April, at about the same time that the 1st Depot Company departed Montford Point for the South Pacific, the 51st Composite Defense Battalion received a new commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Floyd A. Stephenson, just returned from service with the 4th Defense Battalion at Pearl Harbor and in the New Hebrides. Stephenson found he had a half-strength battalion, scarcely 500 men. Within two weeks Stephenson was recommending that the 51st become a regular defense battalion, stating "that there is nothing that suitable colored personnel cannot be taught." Colonel Woods sent forward the recommendation with a strongly favorable endorsement. On 28 May it was approved by the powers in Headquarters Marine Corps and the term "Composite" was dropped from the battalion's designation by July. In September the battalion moved across Scales Creek

into an old Civilian Conservation Corps camp now redesignated Camp Knox and in October reached a strength of 1,700. In November an inspecting party, including Secretary Knox and General Holcomb, came down to Onslow Beach to see the battalion's 90mm Antiaircraft Artillery Group shoot. The towed target was shot down within a minute after "Open fire." Lieutenant Colonel Stephenson said laconically to General Holcomb, "I think they're ready now."

In early December, Stephenson went to Headquarters Marine Corps to get his orders to take his battalion overseas and learned to his dismay that he was going to lose 400-odd Marines as a cadre for a 52d Defense Battalion which was to be formed. In early January 1944 the first of 175 freight cars started rattling out of Camp Lejeune bearing the impedimenta of the 51st. By the night of 19 January only a handful of the 51st was still at Camp Knox. There was a farewell party that got out of hand. (Such shivarees were almost a tradition for departing units, black and white.) Shots were fired. A random shot wounded a drill instructor slightly.

A veteran 90mm crew of the 51st Defense Battalion with its gun, "Lena Horne," at Eniwetok in 1945.

Marine Corps photo



The well-liked Stephenson was relieved. The new commanding officer was Colonel Curtis W. LeGette, a veteran artillery officer who had begun his Marine Corps service with an enlistment in 1910 and who had just returned from command of the 7th Defense Battalion in the Ellice Islands.

All the weapons and equipment laboriously packed and shipped remained on the West Coast. The 51st, with nothing much more than personal property, embarked at San Diego on 11 February in a merchant transport, SS *Meteor*, and learned its designation was the Ellice Islands where it was to relieve LeGette's old command, the 7th Defense Battalion in place, taking over the 7th's property and weapons. Half of the battalion went to the island of Nanomea, the other half to Funafuti. The most exciting thing that happened to the 51st in the Ellice Islands was on 28 March when its 155mm guns on Nanomea fired 11 rounds at a suspected Japanese submarine. (At Chicago I talked to several Montford Pointers who remain firmly convinced that they did sink an enemy submarine.)

Activated on 15 December 1943, the 52d Defense Battalion had much less troubled getting organized than the 51st. Because of the cadre taken out of the 51st, one out of three of its black Marines had some experience in antiaircraft, seacoast, or field artillery. The commanding officer was Colonel Augustus W. "Old Gus" Cockrell who had spent a year at West Point and four years as an enlisted Marine before being commissioned in 1922. More recently he had commanded the 8th Defense Battalion in Samoa and on Wallis Island. In July, Colonel Cockrell moved up to take Colonel Woods' place as camp commander. Command of the 52d was taken over by Lieutenant Colonel Joseph W. Earnshaw, Naval Academy 1927 and an experienced artillery officer.

At about this same time, all Marine defense battalions, white and black, lost their seacoast artillery groups and were reorganized as antiaircraft artillery battalions. Only the 6th, 51st, and 52d retained the designation "defense battalion"; all the rest were renamed "antiaircraft battalions."

First combat for black Marines came on D-Day, 15 June 1944, at Saipan in the Mariana Islands, but not to the defense battalions. The 7th Field Depot, supporting the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions of the V Amphibious Corps, had assigned to it the 3d Ammunition Company and the 18th, 19th, and

20th Depot Companies. The 3d Ammunition Company's chores included the precarious task of working the pontoon barges serving as floating dumps at the reef's edge. Ashore, Private First Class Leroy Seals of Brooklyn was mortally wounded. (He would die the following day.) That night the ammo company Marines found themselves woven into the beachhead perimeter and helped to repel a Japanese counterattack, knocking out a machine gun in the process.

The three depot companies were similarly employed. Captain William M. Barr of the 18th Depot Company reported:

Mortar shells were still raining down as my boys unloaded ammunition, demolition material, and other supplies from amphibious trucks. They set up "security" to keep out snipers as they helped load casualties aboard boats to go to hospital ships. Rifle fire was thick as they rode guard on trucks carrying high octane gasoline from the beach. A squad leader killed a Jap sniper that crawled into a foxhole next to his. They stood waist deep in surf unloading boats as vital supplies of food and water were brought in . . . there were only a few scattered snipers on the beach. My boys accounted for several of these.

Captain William C. Adams, commanding the 20th Depot Company, was equally laudatory of the performance of his black Marines. His runner, Private Kenneth J. Tibbs of Columbus, Ohio, was wounded on D-Day and, by dying before Private First Class Seals, would become the first black Marine fatality. Captain Adams noted that his lightly armed Marines "were very provident, and by the second day had all types of arms they had never been issued, such as . . . machine guns . . ."

Guam would follow Saipan. D-Day (called "W-Day" in this case) was 21 July 1944. During shore party operations, the 2d Ammunition Company was in direct support of the 3d Marine Division landing north of Agana, and the 4th Ammunition Company was in support of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade landing near Agat. I was with the engineer company of the 5th Field Depot, and I don't think I had seen a black Marine until I met up with elements of the 4th Ammunition Company on the beach and learned that their commander was my old



Marine Corps photo

Two black Marines take cover on the beach at Iwo Jima on D-Day while the shattered hulk of an amphibious truck smokes behind them.

friend from Quantico, 1st Lieutenant Russell S. (“Frenchy”) LaPointe. That night a platoon of the 4th intercepted a party of explosive-laden Japanese headed for the brigade ammunition dump and killed 14 of them.

Even after the island was officially declared “secured,” there was considerable fighting on Guam. Ammunition dumps were in remote areas and attracted Japanese. On 27 September, in one such action, Private First Class Luther Woodward, who had grown up in the bayou country of Mississippi, organized a patrol that tracked the Japanese back into the bush. He himself accounted for at least two with his rifle. By then I was the adjutant of the 5th Field Depot, and I was pleased to help “Frenchy” LaPointe prepare the recommendation that got Woodward a Bronze Star, later raised to a Silver Star.

On 19 August 1944, while the depot and ammunition companies were embroiled in the Marianas, the 52d Defense Battalion entrained at Camp Lejeune for California. After a month spent in the brown hills of Camp Pendleton, the battalion

embarked in the USS *Winged Arrow* (AP 170) at San Diego, destined for the Marshall Islands. In mid-October, Detachment A, half the battalion, relieved the 1st Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion at Majuro, and Detachment B, the other half, relieved the 15th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion at Roi-Namur. There had been hard fighting there nine months earlier but by now the war had moved on to the west and the possibility of a Japanese air attack was remote. Boredom was relieved by reconnaissance patrols sent to neighboring atolls. One such patrol brought back three Japanese prisoners held by the native Marshallese.

The black Marine experience at Peleliu, D-Day 15 September 1944, was much the same as Saipan and Guam. The 16th Field Depot, which included the 7th Ammunition Company and 11th Depot Company, was in support of the 1st Marine Division in that bloody operation. With 17 wounded-in-action, the 11th Depot Company had the highest casualty rate of any black Marine unit in World War II.

Concurrently with Peleliu, the 51st was gathered together at Funafuti and moved forward to

Eniwetok in the Marshalls, where it relieved the 10th Antiaircraft Battalion with emplacements on Engebi, Parry, and Porky Islands as well as Eniwetok itself. No enemy aircraft ever appeared.

On Guam, on Christmas 1944, I was having dinner with the officers of the 2d and 4th Ammunition Companies (their small mess always fed well; souvenirs traded well on ammunition ships for refrigerated Navy chow) when Condition Black was set by Island Command. We had occasional Condition Red, meaning air raid imminent, and usually resolving itself into a false radar signal or an unidentified plane wandering into Guam's air space, but Condition Black meant invasion imminent, which made no sense.

I roared back in my jeep to 5th Field Depot's base camp—we were in tents—at the base of Orote Peninsula and learned that an island-wide race riot was in progress, something that we later called the “Third Battle of Guam.” Trouble had been building for some time. On the day before a white sailor had shot and killed a black depot company Marine in an altercation over a brown girl; and a jittery depot company Marine on sentry duty shot and killed a 3d Marine Division white Marine, one of three who had been taunting him.

Whites and blacks, primarily white Marines and black sailors, had been fighting in Agana, once, no doubt, a most picturesque Spanish colonial town, but now blasted flat. Island Command declared the town out of bounds to all hands, but the black sailors, who were members of poorly disciplined port companies which provided stevedore labor to the Naval Supply Depot that was building on Orote Peninsula, suspected that whites were still allowed in Agana. They sallied forth from the Naval Supply Depot in commandeered trucks, heavily armed with pilfered weapons, including machine guns, and reoccupied Agana. By the time I got back to the 5th Field Depot camp, the Island Command military police had driven them out of Agana and had pressed them back into the Naval Supply Depot where they barricaded themselves in the giant pre-fabricated steel warehouses.

I remember an military police captain asking me if the 5th Field Depot could provide some half-tracks to blast the recalcitrants out of the warehouses. I think the depot commander's decision was that they could borrow the half-tracks but that the

depot would not provide the crews. In any case the fighting did not escalate to that level.

Some of this, but not all, got through wartime censorship and into the press back home. There were demands for an investigation and a Court of Inquiry was convened to determine the cause of the “riot and affray.” Colonel Samuel Woods came out to be the president of the court.

William W. White, light-skinned, blue-eyed, and the long-time executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People arrived to observe the court and was allowed by Colonel Woods to question the witnesses. I was his escort officer for a good part of his stay. The black Marines, while not blameless, acquitted themselves well before the court.

While these events were taking place on Guam, four black Marine companies, as part of 8th Field Depot, fought at Iwo Jima. The 8th Ammunition and 36th Depot Companies landed on D-Day, 19 February 1945. They were joined on 24 February by the 33d and 34th Depot Companies who had been working as ships' platoons at the start point of the unloading process. Two Marines of the 36th Depot Company, Privates James M. Whitlock and James Davis, received Bronze Stars.

In late March 1945, Detachment A, 52d Defense Battalion, came forward from Majuro to Guam, going into camp near Barrigada village, not far from the camp of the 5th Field Depot's depot companies. Threat of air attack was remote but there was patrolling to do against the hundreds of Japanese stragglers who still infested the island. The 52d got its first kill on 1 April within a thousand yards of its camp.

Okinawa would see 11 black Marine companies employed. On D-Day, 1 April 1945, three ammunition companies—the 1st, 3d, and 12th—and four depot companies—the 5th, 18th, 37th, and 38th—arrived off the island as part of the 7th Field Depot. Later in the month the 20th Depot Company came in from Saipan, followed in May by the 9th and 10th Companies from Guadalcanal and the 19th Company from Saipan. Distances from the beaches to the front were much greater than they had been in the earlier island campaigns. Torrential spring rains turned the rudimentary road net into a quagmire. Black Marine casualties were scattered but continuous. Altogether, including members of the

Stewards Branch (who often volunteered as stretcher bearers), more than 2,000 black Marines served on Okinawa.

In early May, Detachment B, 52d Defense Battalion, joined Detachment A on Guam. The battalion commander was now Lieutenant Colonel Thomas C. Moore, Jr., a Georgian who had been with the 3d Defense Battalion in the Guadalcanal campaign. His Marines expected to move forward to Okinawa, where there was a real enemy air threat. Loading out had actually begun when a change of orders directed that the battalion stay in place to relieve the 9th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion which had been on Guam since the landing a year before. Morale plummeted and not even the arrival of "Hashmark" Johnson to be the battalion's sergeant major could offset the disillusionment.

On 1 June 1945, Supply Service, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, [The Supply Service, created in August 1944, brought together all field depots and base depots.] was redesignated as Service Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. The 7th and 8th Field Depots became the 7th and 8th Service Regiments. (I was plucked from what was now the 5th Service Depot and sent, as an embryonic public relations officer, to Okinawa to see if I could not get some favorable publicity for the 7th Service Regiment.)

Meanwhile, on Guam, on 12 July, the 52d Defense Battalion began providing working parties to Island Command and by the end of the war in August had become a de facto labor battalion. The antiaircraft emplacements were stood down and on 30 September 1945 operational control passed to the 5th Service Depot.

In November the 52d departed from Guam, half to go to Eniwetok and half to Kwajalein (a detachment of the 51st had gone there in June) to relieve the 51st. With the war over no one even pretended that the move was tactical. The same ships that brought the 52d in, took the 51st out. With some detours the 51st sailed for home, most reaching Montford Point by Christmas. On 31 January the 51st Defense Battalion was disbanded.

That same month the 52d Defense Battalion returned to Guam. Priority for return to the States and discharge for all the U.S. Services was determined by a complicated point system that gave an

individual so many points for months of service, months overseas, time in combat, wounds, and so forth. Low-point men in the 52d were transferred into the Heavy Antiaircraft Group (Provisional) Saipan, which was to be a post-war black unit. High-point men sailed for San Francisco in February, moved to the receiving barracks at Camp Pendleton, and were discharged. The shrunken remainder of the 52d left Guam for San Diego in March 1946. Men eligible for discharge, who had enlisted west of the Mississippi, were dropped off at Camp Pendleton. The rest of the battalion went on to its old camp at Montford Point where, after the discharge of most of the remaining old-timers, it was redesignated as the 3d Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion (Composite).

The first depot company to be disbanded after the war's end was the 4th Marine Depot Company on Guam on 31 October 1945. All 49 depot companies and all 12 ammunition companies served in the Pacific, but only seven ammunition companies and 12 depot companies saw combat. The remainder were destined to stay in the backwaters of the war performing unglamorous, but necessary, duties: the 4th Service Depot on Banika in the Russell Islands, the 5th Service Depot on Guam, the 6th Base Depot on Oahu, and in various other service and supply units. The last depot companies to be disbanded were the 8th and 49th Companies, also on Guam, on 30 September 1947.

In the spring of 1949, recruit training of black Marines was transferred from Montford Point to Parris Island, South Carolina. Twenty-five years later, on 19 April 1974, the old Montford Point Camp, by then a modern facility bearing almost no resemblance to the wartime camp, was officially designated Camp Gilbert H. Johnson. Sergeant Major "Hashmark" Johnson, USMC (Ret), had died on 5 August 1972 of a heart attack while addressing a testimonial dinner given him by the Camp Lejeune Chapter of the Montford Point Marine Association. Camp Johnson now houses most of the schools of Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune, including Motor Transport, Food Service, Supply, Personnel Administrative, Financial Management, Instructional Management, Combat Water Survival Swimming, and Field Medical Service.

Excerpt: BGen Edwin H. Simmons' memorandum from *Fortitudine*, Summer 1991, 3-8.

The African American Marine Training Experience, Montford Point

By LtCol Lynn J. Kimball (Ret)

Since the founding of the Marine Corps in 1775, no African Americans had served in the Corps other than a few during the American Revolution. Of the other major branches of the military, African Americans could serve in the Army only in all-black units, which were separated from white units “[in] tactical organization, in physical location, [and] in human contacts . . . as completely as possible.” African Americans had a long history of service in the Navy, but between 1922 and 1942 the Navy restricted their enlistment except as stewards or messmen.

The radical about-face in the Navy Department’s policy in early 1942 resulted not only from an urgent need for additional military personnel, but also from domestic politics. In the Depression-weary early 1940s, African Americans’ frustration with the discrimination practiced by private industry and the armed services had reached a fever pitch. In 1940–1941 they suffered from more unemployment and poverty “than most whites had known during the worst year of the depression.” Jobs in the expanding defense industries remained closed to them, and opportunities in the military remained as

restricted as ever, although all the services were taking on record numbers of white recruits.

By early 1942 it had become apparent that “the existing system [of essentially excluding African Americans from the military] involved an unacceptable waste of manpower.” In April 1942, after continued pressure from President Roosevelt, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox advised the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard that they would soon be required to accept African Americans for service in capacities other than messmen. In May, based on a plan drafted by the Corps, the Navy made public the Marines’ intention to enlist 1,000 African Americans per month beginning 1 June, and to form “a racially segregated 900-man defense battalion” to be trained at Marine Barracks New River, which was then under construction.

The Marine Corps for the most part followed the example of the Army in its policies toward African American personnel. Its aim was to maintain the strictest segregation possible from boot camp through active duty, to prevent black noncommissioned officers (NCOs) from outranking or commanding whites, and to ensure that “few, if any” black

NCOs shared the same rank as white NCOs in any unit. Qualified or promising recruits were to be advanced as quickly as possible to become NCOs, at which time they would replace white NCOs.

In April 1942 the Montford Point area of the camp was designated as the first Marine Corps training camp for African American recruits. Unlike white Marines, who went to boot camp at either Parris Island or San Diego and were then sent elsewhere for advanced training, except for a few specialist schools at neighboring Camp Davis, the entire training regimen for African Americans was to be based at Montford Point. The Marine Corps policy, following the example used by the U.S. Army, which also segregated black troops, stipulated that black and white Marines would experience exactly the same training, discipline, and have separate but identical recreational facilities on Marine Corps posts.

When the Commandant of the Marine Corps issued the order in April 1942 to begin constructing the African American training center, Montford Point was already the site of a Marine encampment. The Post Troops of Marine Barracks New River had recently moved there from the



Montford Point Camp, 1943.

Tent Camp Area and would stay until their permanent facilities at Hadnot Point were completed (August 1942). This was a tent camp, but it included several buildings acquired with the land. In any case, it was clearly inadequate for the approximately 1,360 enlisted men and 44 officers of the base defense battalion that was scheduled to begin arriving in August 1942. In July 1942 temporary troop housing was increased at Montford Point by the erection of 150 additional portable (Homosite) huts.

One hundred twenty of the huts were erected in a new cantonment, Montford Point Camp No. 1, which was completed in August 1942. The first African American Marine recruits arrived on 26 August, and the 51st Composite Defense Battalion was activated before the month was out. Training began that

September. Howard P. Perry of Charlotte, North Carolina, was the first African American recruit to set foot in Montford Point. During eight weeks of boot camp each recruit received the same weapons and field training, physical conditioning, and instruction in garrison-type subjects as their white counterparts. Two weeks of preliminary marksmanship training was conducted at Montford Point, culminated by a week of live firing at the Rifle Range. Until the cantonment for them at the range was completed, the African American recruits were trucked to the range each day before dawn and returned to camp before nightfall.

The problems of slow recruitment began to ease with the activation of the selective service system, and, beginning in January 1943, 1,000 African American Marines were to be drafted per

month. Until that time the duty assignments available to these new Marines were limited to the 51st Composite Defense Battalion, the messmen's branch, and duties as messmen in general messes, chauffeurs, messengers, post exchange clerks, janitors, maintenance, and policing. But the great influx of African Americans in early 1943 was clearly more than the 51st Defense Battalion could accommodate, so the Secretary of the Navy authorized the creation of the 52nd Defense Battalion, the Marine Corps Messman Branch (later changed to Steward's Branch), and the first of 63 combat support companies (depot and ammunition companies).

Following the activation of the draft and the corresponding influx of new recruits, Montford Point was substantially enlarged during the first half of 1943, both

organizationally and physically. New post buildings, constructed of structural tile and stucco because of the shortage and expense of other materials, were arranged in a string along the western side of the main road (Montford Point Landing Road) leading in and out of the camp. Facilities included an administration building, a hostess house, a new infirmary, a new brig, the post theater/gymnasium, and a set of four classroom buildings.

By March 1943 a new 1,000-man encampment, Montford Point Camp No. 2, was placed below the original cantonment, near the end of the point. After finishing basic training in the main camp area, troops assigned to the Messman Branch or a depot or ammunition company were billeted in Camp No. 2 for final training before they shipped out for

active duty. Camp No. 2A, close to but still separate from Camp No. 2, housed all of Montford Point's white officers and special enlisted personnel.

Montford Point Camp No. 3 was built around the northwestern and northeastern sides of Camp No. 1, and although it was identified as a separate phase of construction, Camp No. 3 was essentially an extension of the original encampment. By mid-1943 the Recruit Depot Battalion, the Motor Transport School, and the African American cadre (post personnel) had moved into Camp No. 3. Part of the 51st Defense Battalion was also billeted in Camp No. 3, with a few companies and batteries (such as communications and searchlight units) scattered elsewhere in Camp No. 3 wherever space was available. In September 1943 the entire 51st

Defense Battalion moved into several of the former Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) barracks at Camp Knox, sharing the camp with the War Dog Training School.

The 1st Marine Ammunition Company was organized at Montford Point in September 1943, and from October 1943 to September 1944 two depot companies and one ammunition company were activated at Montford Point each month. Ultimately, 51 depot companies and 12 ammunition companies would be formed at Montford Point. Ironically, the men in these units, most of which were posted forward to support combat units in the Pacific, experienced more fighting than the 51st and 52nd Defense Battalions, which had been trained for combat.

Most African American Marines were discharged at Montford Point in 1945–1946. Unlike their white counterparts, African Americans returned from overseas duty with their units rather than individually in order to maintain racial segregation. The Recruit Depot was disbanded, and the Homosote huts of Camp No. 1 were removed immediately after the war. Even after demobilization had been achieved, the Marine Corps kept Montford Point active; the Corps was still segregated and all African American Marines were still trained there. Following the desegregation of the Corps in 1949, Montford Point Camp became the home of several service support schools.

Excerpt: *Semper Fidelis: A Brief History of Onslow County, North Carolina, and Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune* (U.S. Marine Corps, 2006), 40–43.

The chapel at Montford Point served both Catholics and Protestants with a revolving pulpit just like a revolving stage in theaters.

Courtesy of Roger Smith



“Route 66” Detour to Jacksonville, NC

Montford Point’s Recreation Officer, Musician/Actor Bobby Troup

By Kenneth H. Williams, *Senior Editor*

If you ever plan to motor west . . .

Robert W. “Bobby” Troup Jr. actually had what seems to have been his first “California trip” courtesy of the United States Marines at the end of 1944 on his way to the Pacific island of Saipan. The future composer of “Route 66” and costar of the television drama *Emergency!* was leading a company of African American Marines, a command he had assumed after spending more than a year as the recreation officer at the segregated training facility on the North Carolina coast. The aspiring musician had become a favorite among the men, but not necessarily with his fellow white officers.

Troup had enlisted in the Marines right out of college in 1941, but with a few interesting twists in his background for someone so young, including authorship of a hit song. He was born on 18 October 1918 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where his grandfather had founded a music store. When he was six, his family moved about 35 miles to Lancaster, where his father ran a branch of the family music business. His father was also a pianist,

and young Bobby began playing the piano at an early age and soon tried other instruments in the store. “But I wasn’t a prodigy by any means,” he later insisted, noting that “my first real instrument was the tuba, and I played in the high school band.” After high school, he spent a year at The Hill preparatory school before matriculating at the University of Pennsylvania, from which he graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a degree in economics from the Wharton School of Business.

He was in an unusual situation when he graduated in June 1941, because he had the number-one song on the national charts at the time. Troup, who by then was

Capt Robert W. “Bobby” Troup Jr., 1943



concentrating on playing piano and composing, had written “Daddy” for a college show in 1940. At a friend’s request, he had arranged the song for the friend’s combo, which was playing at the Embassy Club in Philadelphia. As Troup remembered, “One night while I was studying, I got a frantic call from this friend.” Bandleader Sammy Kaye was at the club and had requested the tune five times. Troup “rushed down to the club, met Sammy, and he put me under contract.” Kaye recorded the song with his band, and it became one of his biggest hits. The Andrews Sisters, Joan Merrill, and Frankie Masters all also charted with “Daddy” in 1941.

The family was expecting Troup to come home to help run the music stores, but he had other more immediate obligations. Having participated in reserve officer training in college, he enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve on 21 May 1941 (three weeks before graduation) and was selected for officer training at Quantico, Virginia. While awaiting orders, “Daddy” ascended the charts, and he suddenly found his talents in demand. As he wrote in



Troup (at piano) playing with fellow musicians at Montford Point, 1943.

a letter to the Marine command on 11 September while seeking to clarify his status, "There are several jobs that have been offered to me, and if I can be reasonably certain of the future, I can take advantage of these opportunities." He must have gotten the assurance that he needed, as he took a position writing for the Tommy Dorsey band and penned "Snootie Little Cutie," which Dorsey recorded in February 1942 with vocals by Frank Sinatra and Connie Haines. It became a minor hit.

By that time, after the attack on Pearl Harbor and U.S. entry into World War II, much had changed in the world, and in Troup's corner of it. His orders dated 19 January 1942 told him to report to Quantico on 1 February. While "Snootie Little Cutie" was climbing the charts, Troup was completing officer training in the woods of northern Virginia and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve on 4 April. He married his girlfriend, Cynthia Hare, on 2 May before returning to Quantico for a platoon commander course and subsequently

an artillery course, completing the latter training on 22 August.

Take me away from Jacksonville . . .

The Marine Corps carefully screened the white officers it sent to the newly opened segregated training facility at Montford Point near Jacksonville, North Carolina, on the outskirts of Camp Lejeune. Troup's service record does not indicate how he was chosen for this duty, but upon completion of his artillery training, he was assigned as one of some two dozen white officers for the 51st Defense Battalion (Composite), the first African American unit to be formed.

Gilbert H. "Hashmark" Johnson, who became a legend among the Montford Point men (and for whom the camp was later named), stated that Troup was "one of our top favorites" among the white officers. "He was a top-notch musician, a very decent sort of an officer, and one which all of the men catered to or they looked up to." Obie Hall recalled Troup as the only white officer who stood out in his memory, adding that "he was the sharpest cat I ever seen in my life." Theodore R. Britton Jr., who went on to a distinguished postwar

career and rose to the rank of ambassador, mentioned Troup and Colonel Samuel A. Woods, the camp commander, as officers "who were so special that [they] captured the attention and the affection of many of us." Troup "was just like one of us," Al Banker observed, adding that "color didn't mean a thing to him." Averet Conley noted that Troup "knew nothing about prejudice" and that "it burned him up when he would have to face that with us." Conley remembered Troup as "just a nice guy all the way around."

Troup was a battery officer in charge of recruit platoons through the spring of 1943, when he was made the camp's first recreation and athletic officer. It was the perfect assignment for someone who, in addition to being a musician, had run track and played tennis in college. In his new billet, Troup took a "haul ass" approach to improving the substandard facilities, according to the Montford Point Marines who spoke at his memorial service. He organized the men and obtained supplies to build a recreation hall, basketball court, and outdoor boxing ring. In what was considered a bit of a coup, he also got a friend to install a miniature golf course. Under his guidance, the troops formed baseball, basketball, football, track, and boxing teams for intramural competition as well as contests with other camps. (Top Montford Point athletes included Dan Bankhead, who in August 1947 became the first African American to pitch in the major leagues.) Troup was also able to bring in first-rate entertainment, including Louis Armstrong and the bands of Duke



Marine Corps photo

Capt Troup with Pvt Finis R. Henderson

Ellington, Count Basie, and Lionel Hampton.

Troup's real passion was music, and he found many who shared this interest among the recruits. One was a fellow Philadelphia jazzman, trumpeter Joseph B. "Joe" Wilder, who had already toured with the bands of Hampton and Les Hite. (Wilder would have a substantial postwar jazz career, playing with everyone from Dizzy Gillespie to Count Basie.) Although just barely out of his teens, Wilder was the star soloist for the jazz band that Troup organized. It featured many college-educated musicians who had played in regional bands across the country. A release at the time for the African American press declared that "one of the best dance orchestras in the armed services is at Montford Point Camp." The ensemble was

led by saxophonist Edwin Golden, who had served brief stints with the Jimmie Lunceford and Erskine Hawkins bands. Although Troup was not a regular member of the group, "he used to be with them all the time," recalled one of the men. According to the press release, Troup "contributed much in inspiration and musical art to the high calibre of the Marine orchestra." There was also a symphony Troup helped organize and equip that numbered 35 members by 1944.

Other musicians of note among the Montford Point Marines were Finis R. Henderson, who had sung and tap-danced in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer films, and pianist and organist Audrick G. Wiltshire, who had once accompanied Billie Holiday as part of a combo led by guitarist Al Casey. Troup also encountered a fellow aspiring

songwriter, Clyde Otis, who widely credited Troup as the person who inspired and encouraged him to pursue a composing career. Otis would end up writing numerous hits among his 800-plus compositions (including "The Stroll" for the Diamonds and "It's Just a Matter of Time" for Brook Benton) and became one of the first African Americans to hold executive positions in the music industry.

Troup didn't relish his time at Montford Point any more than the men did. It would not have helped, as Hall remembered it, that "the other officers didn't care for him at all." So Troup spent most of his time with the African American enlisted men instead of the white officers, many of whom were southerners and shared little common background with him. Troup's wife was with him for at least part of his tour, but she was a former Philadelphia debutante, so a small southern town was foreign from anything in her experience as well.

Being a songwriter, Troup set his frustration to music, writing "Take Me Away from Jacksonville," the lyrics for which appear on the opposite page. This song became an unofficial anthem among the men, who sometimes sang it as they worked. According to Johnson, "the song caught on and swept the ranks at Montford Point like wildfire. It extended even beyond Montford Point because the white Marines at Hadnot Point were also caught up with the same feelings, which they had an opportunity to express through the song." In one of the shows in the recreation

Take Me Away from Jacksonville

VERSE

I'm more certain each day
I'll go crazy if I'm forced to stay
In this hole of a city
And this is not a humourous ditty,
Jacksonville doesn't make me feel witty
Gizmo's café gives me bad dreams all day
You'll get cleaned at the tired Rainbow Cleaner's
Adlers' Margolis and Leders'
Make swell places for breeding mosquitos
Jacksonville you are so far behind the times
You are a bleak place, a graveyard with signs

CHORUS

Take me away from Jacksonville,
'cause I have had my fill and that's no lie.
Take me away from Jacksonville,
keep me away from Jacksonville until I die.
Jacksonville stood still,
while the rest of the world passed by.

I wanna go back to a town
'Where people know their way around' and live
I wanna go back to a town where

people know their way around' and live
This town's got me down
My inhibitions are threatening to give

VERSE

Half of your furlough you'll spend at the depot
Where busses run once every month
In this keen state of North Carolina
You will find there are may things finer
Than that street car they call Coleman's Diner
Just because it's "Class A", the King Bee makes you pay
Prices too steep for John Jacob Astor
And you'll find all the waitresses sassier
Than a club in New York much more classier
Jacksonville I'm wondering what is your claim to fame
Your namesake further south, drives you to shame

CHORUS

Take me away from Jacksonville,
'cause I've have had my fill and that's no lie
Take me away from Jacksonville,
Keep me away from Jacksonville until I die
I won't be happy 'til,
I've seen the last of Jacksonville

hall, Henderson sang "Take Me Away from Jacksonville" while stage hands blew brown confetti in the air with fans to simulate the dusty streets of their despised locale.

Promoted to captain in October 1943, Troup remained the recreation and athletic officer for another year until given command of Company A, 6th Marine Depot Company (second of that name), in October 1944 in preparation for deployment. Johnson recalled that "there was a rapid influx of individuals running over each other to go out with that depot company under Captain Bobby Troup." The unit was sent to California that December and

sailed in January 1945 for Saipan, where it handled supplies at the base there. As Banker put it, Troup "was with us from the beginning to the end."

Travel my way, take the highway that's the best . . .

Troup returned stateside at the end of October 1945 and spent two weeks at the Marine barracks on Terminal Island in San Pedro, California, before being relieved from active duty on 14 November. (He remained in the Reserves through 1954.) By the time he got back to Pennsylvania, he had reached two conclusions: he wanted to try a career as a musician and composer, and Southern California

looked like a promising locale.

His family, however, was still expecting him to take over the music stores. "I told them that I just had to find out whether I was a songwriter or not," Troup recalled. "I said, 'You might be angry with me, but this is something I have to do. If I don't make it, OK. I'll come back and sell pianos. But I have to try.'" New York was the leading market for musicians, but Troup had seen and heard about the potential in Los Angeles. He picked California, loaded his wife and two young daughters in the car in Pennsylvania, and headed west. Somewhere along the way, probably at Springfield, Illinois, or St. Louis, they made a fortuitous turn onto U.S. Route 66.

Officially designated as one of the first national highways in 1926, Route 66 was not completely paved in all stretches until 1938. During that period it had become the way west for those fleeing the Dust Bowl, all of whom were seeking better opportunities on the West Coast. For Troup, it most definitely became his road to success.

"I wrote half the song riding along in the car," Troup recalled of "(Get Your Kicks On) Route 66." He completed it upon arrival, and it almost immediately caught the attention of pianist and vocalist Nat "King" Cole, who recorded it with his trio in Hollywood on 15 March 1946. (One source says that Cole recorded it less than a week after Troup arrived.) Given the iconic status the song would reach, it is interesting that it was not a major hit at the time, peaking at number 11



Map by W. Stephen Hill

on the *Billboard* chart. For Troup, however, it was his most important (and ultimately most profitable) composition because it gave his young family a stake on which to live and helped establish him on the Los Angeles music scene.

That scene was burgeoning, drawing on both outstanding local talent (such as Dexter Gordon, Charles Mingus, Art Pepper, and Stan Kenton, who based his band in L.A.) as well as many others who, like Troup, had come west looking for opportunities in a warmer climate. According to Troup, “There must have been 200, 300 clubs where people were doing Cole Porter and Johnny Mercer songs, things like that,” at the time he arrived.

Troup soon became one of those people, steadily playing club dates for the next quarter century. As he later put it, only half in jest, “I think I worked every club in Los Angeles.” Even with the good start and array of opportunities, though, it took Troup a few years to get well established, and he remembered performing in some “stinking dives.”

By 1949, Troup had a regular combo, usually working in a trio with a guitarist and bassist, with Troup on piano and vocals. His style was a combination of the Mercer/Porter supper club fare along with the sound that became known as “West Coast jazz,” a cooler approach to the music than the fierier bebop and big band sounds that were passing out of vogue. Noted jazz critic, Leonard

Feather, described Troup’s singing as having an “ultra-sophisticated, jazz-tinged vocal style.”

Troup also began to get some wider exposure by way of the new medium of television. In 1953, he became a panelist on, and provided the music for, a Los Angeles-based game show called *Musical Chairs*. The series ran nationally on NBC in the summer of 1955. A particular joy for Troup on that show was the opportunity to work with one of his musical heroes, Mercer, who was a fellow panelist. (During this time, he recorded an album titled *Bobby Troup Sings Johnny Mercer*.)

Troup also had a televised opportunity to share his love of jazz. In 1956, he developed a show for the local ABC affiliate called *Stars of Jazz*. It featured

prominent artists like Count Basie, Dave Brubeck, and Sarah Vaughan, as well as other West Coast-based entertainers like Stan Kenton, Julie Christy, and Bud Shank. Troup organized a write-in campaign to keep the show viable and gain sponsorship, and from April through November 1958, it aired nationally on ABC in prime time.

Troup's production talents extended beyond television, and in 1954, they took a personal turn when he was introduced to actress Julie London, who was recently divorced from actor/producer Jack Webb of *Dragnet* fame. Troup's own marriage was ending, and he and London soon bonded over an interest in music. "I heard her sing one night and told her how good she was," Troup recalled. "But Julie had no confidence, and I did everything I could to get her to sing." Troup eventually booked her into a Los Angeles nightclub, where she was an immediate success and held over for 10 weeks. Soon Troup

was encouraging her to record and got her a deal with Liberty Records. Her first release, "Cry Me a River" (1955), was a hit and made her a star. Troup produced some of her recordings and wrote songs for her, and they remained close. After several years of speculation by Hollywood gossip columnists, Troup and London married on 31 December 1959.

Troup was at the peak of his musical career at that time, a stretch that ran from the mid-1950s through the early 1960s. He cut 11 albums during that period, and his songs were recorded by a wide range of musicians, from Miles Davis ("The Meaning of the Blues," on the *Miles Ahead* album), Ella Fitzgerald ("Girl Talk," cowritten with Neal Hefti), and Nat "King" Cole ("Baby, Baby All the Time," "You're Looking at Me," and several others) to Little Richard ("The Girl Can't Help It," a movie title track), Chuck Berry ("Route 66"), the Beach Boys ("Their Hearts Were Full of Spring"), and the Rolling Stones ("Route 66"). Troup estimated

that he wrote 300 songs across the course of his career.

By the mid-1960s, the landscape was changing for Troup, both professionally and personally. Many of the clubs he had played, in Southern California and across the country, were shifting away from the nightclub format, with some transitioning to folk and eventually to rock music. On the home front, he and London had three children in addition to the two she had and the two he had from previous marriages. Troup continued to play club dates, sometimes with London, but he also started acting when the opportunities presented themselves. Not surprisingly, he was often called upon to play musicians, as in the movies *The Five Pennies* and *The Gene Krupa Story* (in which he played Tommy Dorsey). He portrayed musicians and a beatnik on *Perry Mason* episodes, was a regular on the short-lived series *Acapulco*, and had guest spots on popular shows like *Rawhide* and *Mannix*. Troup

The Montford Point baseball team.





Bobby Troup as Dr. Joe Early on the 1970s television show *Emergency!* with wife, Julie London, in the role of nurse Dixie McCall.

had a brief but memorable part as an Army sergeant driving a jeep in the movie version of *M*A*S*H*. In the later 1960s, he got calls to do several episodes of *Dragnet* with his wife's ex-husband.

Jack Webb figured prominently in the next phase of life for Troup and London. He recruited both of them in the early 1970s to costar in a new television drama he was producing called *Emergency!* The series, about a team of Los Angeles paramedics who were supported by doctors and nurses

at Rampart General Hospital, featured Troup as Dr. Joe Early and London as nurse Dixie McCall. "I loved doing the show," Troup recalled, although he said at the time that "after playing nightclubs for 27 years, it was difficult to adjust myself to working days." He added, however, that "I don't miss it as much anymore, because I think the series is the nicest thing that ever happened to me." It ran from 1972 to 1977, with movie-length episodes in 1978 and 1979. Troup and London

were able to be at home with their kids in the evenings and commuted together to the studio from their home in Encino.

Troup played a few club dates in the early 1980s and took a handful of television guest-star roles (his last was on *Simon and Simon* in 1985), but London decided not to act anymore after *Emergency!* Finally free from the hectic pace of doing the series, they enjoyed time for hobbies that included painting and bowling. Troup was also an excellent golfer, often playing with pro Bob Rosburg. Troup and London's last significant musical contribution was to the soundtrack for the Burt Reynolds movie *Sharky's Machine* (1981). Troup had five songs he wrote or cowrote as part of the jazzy score (with vocals by the estimable lineup of Sarah Vaughan, Joe Williams, Peggy Lee, and the Manhattan Transfer), and London made what turned out to be her final recording, singing the standard "My Funny Valentine."

After more than a decade of retirement, Troup died on 7 February 1999 at age 80. As noted above, men from the Montford Point Marines (who were not identified by name in the story) spoke at his memorial service, which was held, appropriately, at a nightclub. One of them remembered Troup as someone who "didn't recognize color, only soul." Music notables were there as well, including Rosemary Clooney, who sang "My Buddy" as a tribute. London, who had suffered a stroke in 1995, passed away just over a year after Troup, in October 2000.

Reference Branch Resources on Montford Point Marines

By Annette D. Amerman, *Historian*

Since the 1920s, the Historical Reference Branch of the Marine Corps History Division has been collecting documentation on a wide variety of subjects, personalities, and units so that branch historians can answer the multitude of questions asked annually. A collection within the branch's holdings that has received a great deal of interest of late is that of the Montford Point Marines. To familiarize those interested in the Montford Point Marines, this article will give an overview of the various parts of the Reference Branch holdings on this topic.

Subject Files

The files that make up the "Subject" collection are the heart of the entire collection. First created by historians in the early days of the branch, the files are used every day to answer the many questions received by the branch.

Within the larger collection on African American Marines, there is a subcollection on Montford Point. The files contain articles written during World War II through the present, notes taken by historians Henry Shaw and Ben Frank in the course of their research, and copies of various operational reports. In addition to the materials in the subcollection "African-American Marines," the branch also holds files on the Montford Point Marines Association.

In an effort to make the research more accessible, the files are being transcribed into spreadsheets and will be available during the coming year.

Biographical Files

The biographical files are the "flesh and blood" of the Corps' history as they contain information on more than 15,000 Marines. The biographical files are of those Marines of prominence—those who rose to general officer, were highly decorated, or were famous (or infamous) for a variety of reasons.

For the more prominent Montford Point Marines, we have biographical files—an example is the file on Frederick Branch who became the first African American Marine officer. While there is not extensive information within each file, sometimes it does contain that "golden nugget" of information

not found elsewhere. Biographical files on more famous Montford Point Marines include not only Branch but also Gilbert H. "Hashmark" Johnson and Edgar Huff. Biographical files on Silver Star recipient Luther Woodard and Bronze Star recipient James Whitlock are also within the collection.

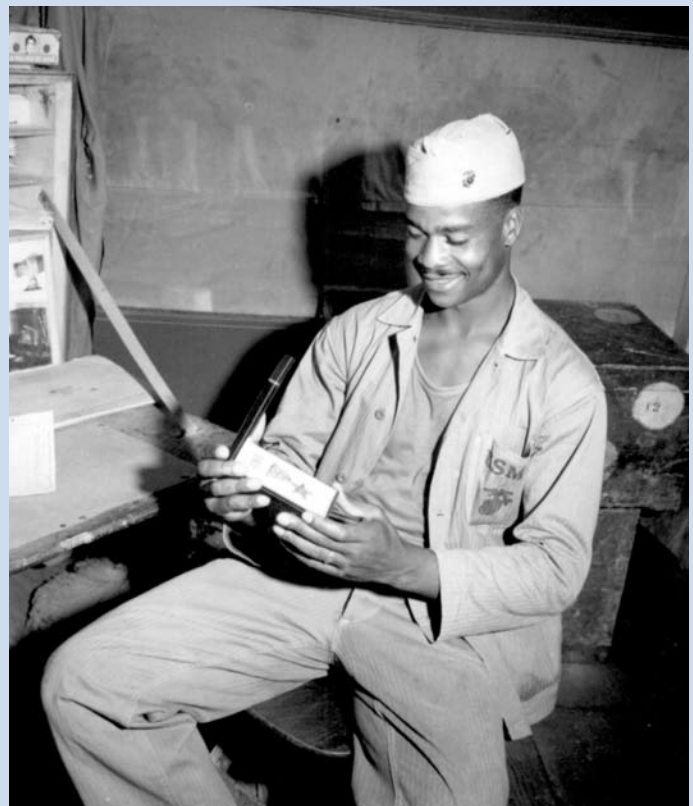
Photographic Files

The photograph collection of African American Marines is not as comprehensive as the other files in the collection. That said, however, the branch does hold a few photos of Montford Point Marines. The few are shots of the Montford Point Marines at Iwo Jima, the defense battalions, and recruit training. The National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland, holds the official collection of Marine Corps photographs.

Unit Files

The unit files have been maintained at the battalion level and above for decades. The branch maintains files on the various defense battalions, including the two battalions (51st and 52d) in which Montford Point Marines served. Files on the field,

Montford Point Marine, Pvt Luther Woodard, admires his Silver Star.
Marine Corps photo



base, and service depot units are less detailed but still contain useful information. Unfortunately, due to the focus on battalion size units, the branch lacks information on the smaller units in which Montford Point Marines served, such as the Marine depot companies, ammunition companies, and the other various service and support companies of World War II.

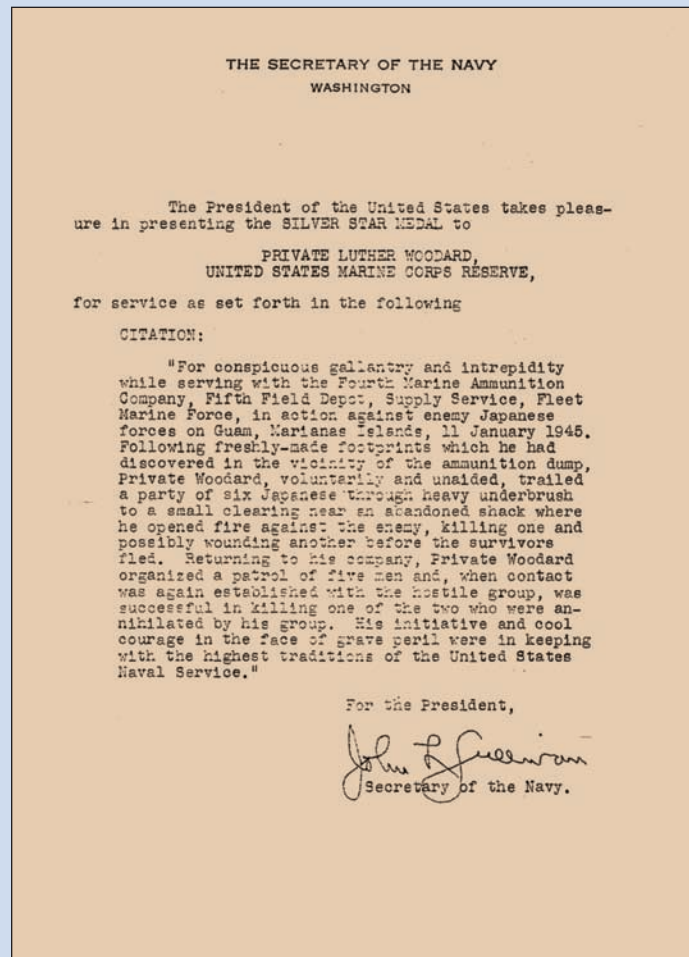
Muster Rolls

From 1798 to the early 1970s, Marine Corps units kept monthly rosters of personnel. Called many things since 1798 (muster rolls, personnel rosters, and unit diaries), they have become a staple of the research conducted over the decades. The Reference Branch maintains a copy of the muster rolls on microfilm dating from 1798 through 1965. The collection of World War II muster rolls is the largest portion of the entire collection and is by far the most heavily used of the rosters. The original muster rolls for this period are maintained by the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. However, in an effort to make more of its material available to a wider audience, the National Archives has worked with private companies such as www.ancestry.com to make muster rolls available online (albeit for a subscriber fee).

The muster rolls were submitted on a monthly basis and while initially for World War II at the battalion level or above, most are at the company level. Research can be conducted down to the individual depot and ammo companies, and the larger units such as the defense battalions. The muster rolls account for personnel who were assigned to the unit, reassigned or transferred into the unit as well as promotions and reductions in rank. The muster rolls also show when the unit has been redesignated or relocated during the given month. In the absence of any operational records, the muster rolls can be used to answer a variety of questions and are sometimes the only primary source available on the unit.

Casualty Cards

Casualty cards from World War II have been an integral part of the Reference Branch for more than 30 years. Each card, filed alphabetically by last name, tells a story of a Marine who was wounded, killed in action, died of wounds received, or was missing in action. The cards, like the muster rolls, can provide detailed information on an individual



versus a unit. Each card contains the full name of the Marine, service number, unit in which he was serving, the geographic location where the event took place (i.e., battle) and any burial information in the case of those Marines who died. Often the casualty card is the only information the branch holds on those Marines who may not have risen to general officer or were highly decorated. The casualty cards are maintained under lock and key for the safety of sensitive information subject to the Privacy Act of 1974 and branch regulations.

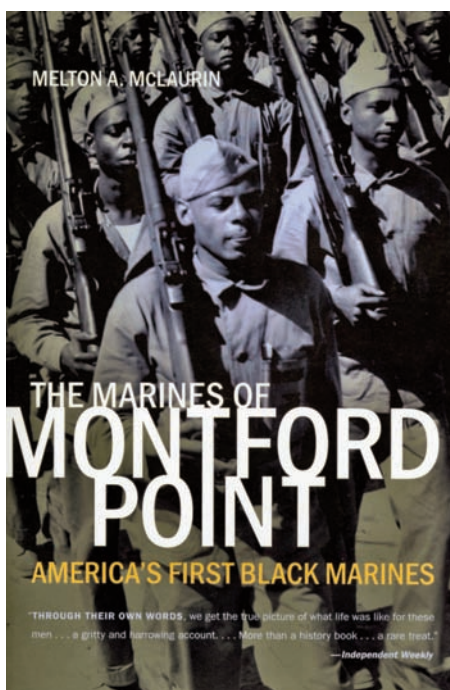
The history of the venerable Montford Point Marines continues to be written by the men themselves and their families; Reference Branch historians remain persistent in their efforts to collect the information. As the branch continues to move the working files collection into the digital age, and as time and staffing permit, more materials will be made available online. In the meantime, researchers are welcome to visit the Historical Reference Branch to review the materials personally. If interested, one can review the website for information on visiting and conducting research at www.history.usmc.mil.

Montford Point Marines

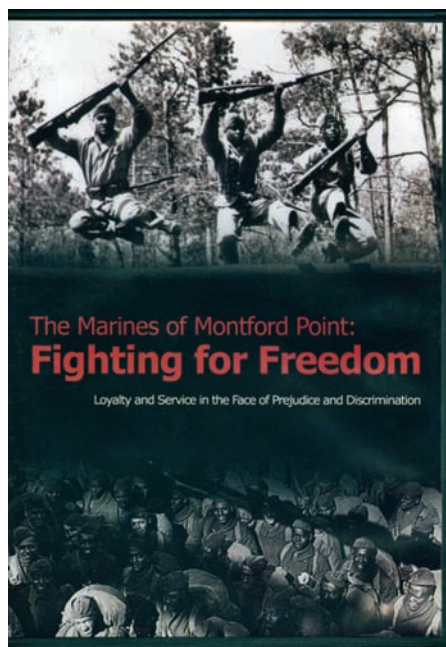
By Charles D. Melson, *Chief Historian*

From the Marine Corps perspective, the 1942–49 experience with racial integration was that the decision to segregate blacks and white Marines could not work during either wartime or peacetime conditions. The argument for diversity and equal opportunity was there, but it was obtained at a cost by the Montford Point Marines. This also occurred with women in the Marine Corps and continued through to a later date before a degree of equality was obtained. With the award of the Congressional Gold Medal to these pioneers, a look at their story is in order.

The first book considered is on the Commandant's reading list, and knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses is essential: Melton A.

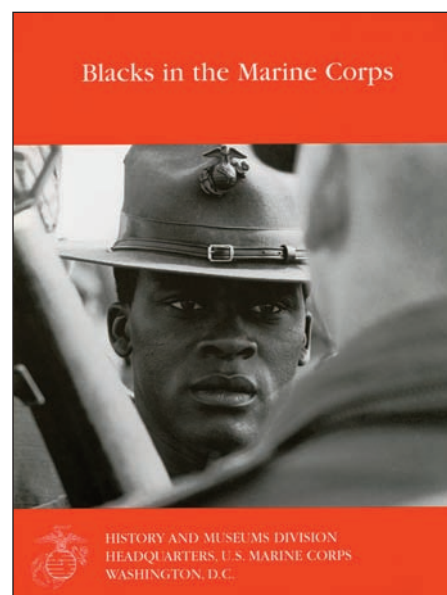


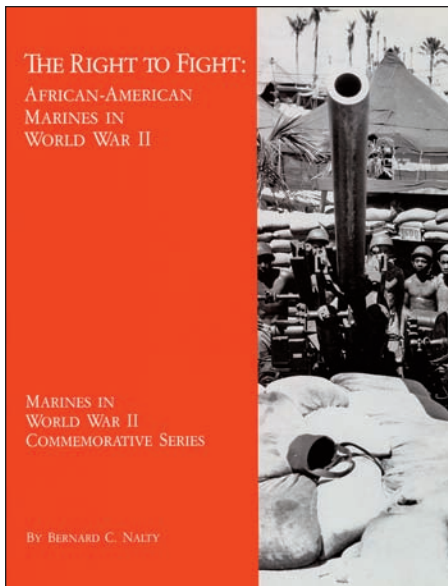
McLaurin's, *The Marines of Montford Point: America's First Black Marines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). McLaurin used a series of 60 interviews ("oral histories"), undertaken by himself and Dr. Clarence Willie (retired Marine), as the basis for his narrative. McLaurin is a historian of the South and civil rights. Background and context are provided by him, and the interviews are arranged topically (Home Towns, Joining Up, Getting There, through the Korean and Vietnam Wars). The book's value is that it puts a human face on the Montford Point experience not found in official publications, but it is based upon 65–70-year-old memories, some accurate and others inaccurate. The book was the result of a television production and a website with interviews and photographs to expand the story. The excellent video is called *The Marines*



of *Montford Point: Fighting for Freedom* (Wilmington: University of North Carolina Wilmington, 2006) and the website is at <http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/index.html>.

A narrative for the Montford Point Marines already exists in History Division's publications. The basic who-what-when-where story is told in the following reference that has withstood the test of time: Henry I. Shaw Jr. and Ralph W. Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps* (Washington DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, Marine Corps, 2002). First written in the 1970s, this official narrative documents the Montford Point experience in some 58 of 109 pages. Shaw and Donnelly, respectively, were the chief historian of the Marine Corps (a World War II and Korean War Marine) and the senior reference historian. The Montford Point Association and the senior





African-American leadership in the Marine Corps contributed to this story. Detailed was the decision by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to partially integrate the armed forces and the resistance of Marine leadership to integration. The book includes the challenges faced finding volunteers and in the processing of those who came through selective service. Leadership issues in terms of both white and black officers, noncommissioned officers, and restrictive assignment policies are highlighted. The authors looked at the two combat units (51st and 52d Defense Battalions) as well as the depot and ammunition companies that actually saw the most combat. Their story needs to be considered in conjunction with the published monographs and official histories for Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa between 1944 and 1945. Postwar reductions and restrictions are discussed in the rest of the story through 1948–49 and President Truman’s call for full integration. The structure of the Fleet Marine Force defense battalions and ammunition and depot companies is presented in a manner, which is lacking

in more general literature. *Blacks in the Marine Corps* has essential factual information that is still valid and provides good background for captains, majors, and staff noncommissioned officers.

Next is Bernard C. Nalty’s *The Right to Fight: African-American Marines in World War II* (Washington DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, Marine Corps, 1995). This was written as part of the 50th anniversary of World War II and is a concise read that focuses entirely on the Montford Point Marines from 1942 to 1945. The author was a former Marine Corps historian, who is also a recognized authority on the effort to desegregate the United States armed forces. His account brings together the previous efforts with broader and additional scholarship. It is useful as a handout at public or Marine Corps events but numbers and availability will have to be coordinated with History Division. This book provides good background for junior officers and noncommissioned officers.

The Montford Point story in seven pages was a promise by a fellow field depot veteran that their story would not be forgotten by the Marine Corps. Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons (“Memorandum from the Director: Montford Point Marines,” *Fortitudine*, Summer 1991) narrates his trip to the Montford Point Association convention in 1991 and the story surrounding the Montford Point Marines. An excerpt of this story starts on page 16, and Simmons’ memorandum is easy to distribute (The web site of the History Division at <http://www.history.usmc.mil> contains electronic publications of the Marine Corps.) or to

serve as the basis for other products requiring sympathetic and authoritative text. This narrative provides background for all and serves as a basic fact sheet.

Two other references of use to Marines interested in this topic are *Integration of the Armed Services, 1940-1965* (Washington DC: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 1981) by Morris J. MacGregor Jr. and *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces: Basic Documents* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1977) by Morris J. MacGregor Jr. and Bernard C. Nalty. Both books are well researched and credible accounts for anyone needing a broader background on the subject from 1940 until 1965. They address the entire armed forces experience from the Department of Defense perspective, and the background for the U.S. Marine Corps has to be dug out. Written by an Army historian, the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps are addressed critically and do not come out looking that progressive in all cases. Still an excellent pair of books but more suited for education rather than training. These are good references for headquarters and senior leadership.



Holcomb's Making of the Modern Marine Corps

By Charles D. Melson
Chief Historian

David J. Ulbrich, *Preparing for Victory: Thomas Holcomb and the Making of the Modern Marine Corps, 1936–1943* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011)

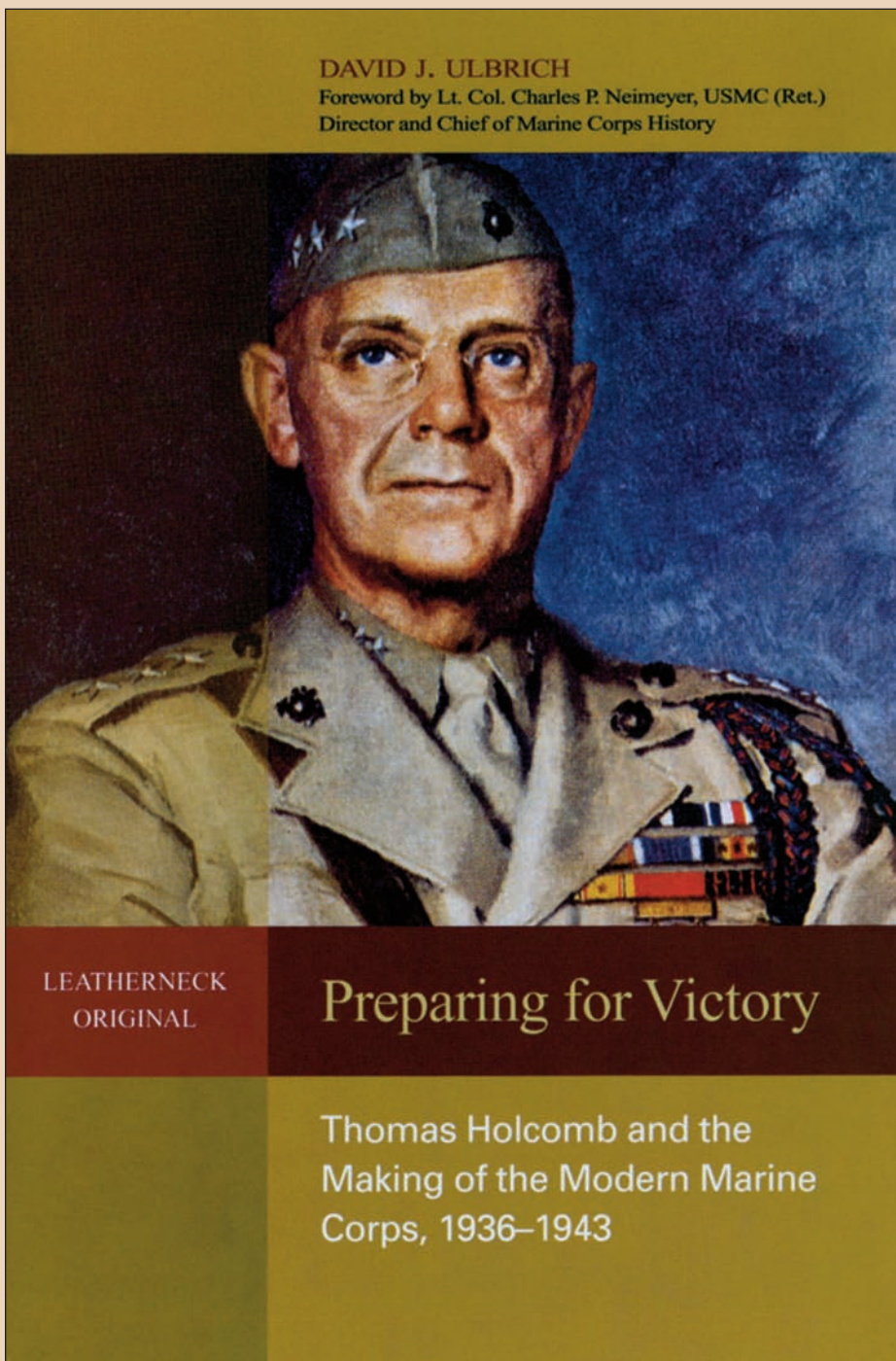
By way of disclosure, I first met Dr. David Ulbrich at the U.S. Marine Corps History and Museum Division while he was working on his 1996 master's thesis on the advent of the Marine Corps defense battalions in the 1930s. I was conducting similar research on the defense battalion program for a commemorative monograph. His thesis was subsequently published by the History Division in 2004 as an occasional paper titled: *Thomas Holcomb and the Advent of the Marine Corps Defense Battalion, 1936-1941*. His academic efforts were supported by well-earned financial grants from the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation as a General Lemuel Shepherd Dissertation Fellow.

It is a pleasure to see how far Dr. Ulbrich and his work have progressed since. He is currently a historian for the U.S. Army Engineer School at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, as well as a senior instructor for Norwich University's military history program. His education includes degrees from Ball State and Temple University. The book being reviewed is a great example of how official, non-profit, and scholars can work together to produce credible military history, in this case an examination of the commandancy of General Thomas

A. Holcomb between the years 1936 and 1943.

Ulbrich contends that Holcomb's abilities and achievements match those of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz and General

George C. Marshall. Despite Holcomb's success, however, he has been given short shrift in the histories of the Marine Corps. To correct the oversight, this detailed biography draws on a



wide range of sources to tell the story of the Marine Commandant who helped transform the Corps into a modern force-in-readiness during the Pacific War and long into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

His publisher, the Naval Institute Press, stated that the two decades that followed World War I brought hard times to the U.S. Marine Corps. The Corps had shrunk from 75,101 Marines in 1918 to only 17,234 by 1936. As international tensions escalated when Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan expanded their military forces, the United States possessed neither the will to fight nor a sufficiently strong military to counter these threats. At this low point in December 1936, Thomas Holcomb became the seventeenth Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Preparing for Victory is the first book to document Holcomb's crucial role as Commandant during the Great Depression and World War II. Ulbrich shows how Holcomb's rare combination of abilities as a progressive manager, a meticulous planner, a visionary leader, and shrewd publicist enabled him to guide the Corps through both the lean prewar period and the brutal war years that followed. Blending biographical, institutional, and operational history with leadership studies, organizational theory, and social and cultural history, the book explains how and why Holcomb succeeded in expanding the Marine Corps from its meager numbers in 1936 to 385,000 by 1943.

This is institutional history as experienced by an individual with a pivotal perspective. Where oth-

ers have stressed the organizational story of the Corps, Ulbrich personalizes it as the story of a man and his times. Yet this perspective is rooted in the present and Ulbrich considered the story with apparent flaws and all. The narrative is tightly written and focused on the efforts and achievements of the makers of the modern Marine Corps. Not lost in the narrative is that this was a team effort rather than that of a single individual or "great man" in history. Both the Corps and Holcomb moved forward together into the twentieth century, facing the stresses and concerns that were a part and parcel of progress. Before Holcomb's tenure, the Marine Corps was a different institution, and after he departed, it would never be the same. It took the skills honed on the battlefields of France, in various small wars, as a competitive marksman, and with a large amount of self-knowledge and study. Holcomb's subsequent service as the wartime U.S. minister

to the Union of South Africa showed that he was also capable of personal growth when faced with the contradictions of fighting a world war for the "Four Freedoms" in the face of overseas colonial and imperial retrenchment.

For U.S. Marines of all stripes, this is essential reading about a Commandant who made a difference to his Corps and Country while remaining an "officer and a gentleman." His ability to learn from his experience and apply it broadly without fanfare proved of value when faced with obstacles that were without precedence. For other Armed Services members it will provide a look inside the Marine Corps family that is as insightful as the careers of other American wartime commanders that are more publically recognized. Holcomb's career and Ulbrich's research are a testament of service to the American people. This book is highly recommended for personal or professional reading.

A dress uniform was not part of the clothing issued to the men at Montford Point, but many spent \$54 to purchase the uniform they wore with pride.

Courtesy of Roger Smith



Two

WHO BECAME LEGENDS

By Bernard C. Nalty

Two of the black Marines who overcame every challenge, Edgar R. Huff and Gilbert H. Johnson, became legends among the men of Montford Point. Both grew up in Alabama, and ultimately would marry twin sisters, but their military backgrounds could not have been more different. Huff's service began when he joined the Marine Corps, but Johnson had served in both the Army and Navy before he reported to Montford Point.

Gilbert H. Johnson earned the nickname "Hashmark" because he wore on the sleeve of his Marine Corps uniform three of the diagonal stripes, called hashmarks, indicating successful previous enlistments. Born in Mt. Hebron, Alabama, in 1905, he joined the Army in 1923 and served two three-year hitches with a black regiment, the 25th Infantry. In 1933, he enlisted in the Naval Reserve as a mess attendant, serving on active duty in officers' messes at various installations in Texas. He entered the regular Navy in May 1941 and had become a steward second class by 1942 when he heard that the Marine Corps was recruiting African Americans.

Gilbert H. "Hashmark" Johnson



With infantry experience ranging from company clerk to mortar gunner and squad leader, Johnson felt he was ideally suited to become a Marine. As regulations required, he applied to the Secretary of the Navy, via the Commandant of the Marine Corps, for a discharge from the Navy in order to join the Marines. He received the necessary permission and reported to Montford Point on 14 November 1942, still wearing his steward's uniform.

As he anticipated, he possessed vitally needed skills that resulted in his being chosen as an assistant drill instructor and later a drill instructor. He ended up supervising the very platoon in which he had started his training. Looking back on his days as a DI, Johnson conceded that he was something of an "ogre" on the drill field. "I was a stern instructor," he said, "but I was fair." He sought, with unswerving dedication, to produce "in a few weeks, and at most a few months, a type of Marine fully qualified in every respect to wear that much cherished Globe and Anchor." In January 1945, he became sergeant major of the Montford Point Camp and in June of that year joined the 52d Defense Battalion on Guam, also as sergeant major, remaining in that assignment until the unit disbanded in 1946.

His subsequent career included service during the Korean War. He retired in 1955 after completing a tour of duty as First Sergeant, Headquarters and Service Company, 3d Marines, 3d Marine Division. He died in 1972. Two years afterward, the Marine Corps paid tribute to his accomplishments by redesignating the Montford Point Camp as Camp Gilbert H. Johnson.

Edgar R. Huff enlisted in the Marine Corps in June 1942 and underwent training at the new Montford Point Camp. "I wanted to be a Marine," he said years later, "because I had always heard that the Marine Corps was the toughest outfit going, and I felt I was the toughest going, so I wanted to be a member of the best organization." His toughness and physical strength had served him well while a crane rigger for the Republic Steel Company in Alabama City, near his home town of Gadsden, Alabama.

Huff reported for duty at a time when the Montford Point operation desper-



Edgar R. Huff

ately needed forceful and intelligent African Americans, with or without previous military experience, to take over from the white noncommissioned officers of the Special Enlisted Staff. Since he possessed the very qualities that the Marine Corps was seeking, he attended a drill instructor's course, served briefly as an assistant to two white drill instructors, took over a platoon of his own, and soon assumed responsibility for all the DIs at Montford Point. He made platoon sergeant in September 1943, gunnery sergeant in November of that year, and in June 1944 became first sergeant of a malaria control detachment at Montford Point. He went overseas six months later as the first sergeant of the 5th Depot Company—the second wartime unit with that designation—served on Saipan, saw combat on Okinawa, and took part in the occupation of North China.

Discharged from the Marine Corps when the war ended, he spent a few months as a civilian and then reenlisted. He saw service in the Korean War and the Vietnam War. During his second tour of duty in Vietnam, he was Sergeant Major, III Marine Amphibious Force, the principal Marine Corps command in Southeast Asia. He retired in 1972 while Sergeant Major, Marine Corps Air Station, New River, North Carolina, and died in May 1994.

Excerpt: Bernard C. Nalty, *The Right to Fight: African-American Marines in World War II* (Washington DC: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1995), 9.

