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MAJ. GEN. BAILEY TAKES CHARGE, FIRST BLACK COMMANDER
OF HISTORIC 1ST MARINE DIVISION



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1st Marine Division gets first African American commander

July 1, 2011



Maj. Gen. Ronald Bailey has assumed command of the Camp Pendleton-based 1st Marine Division, the first African American to command the oldest, largest and most decorated division in the Marine Corps.

In a tradition-laden ceremony Thursday, Bailey assumed command from Maj. Gen. Michael Regner, who will command Marine forces in South Korea.

In attendance were two dozen retired Marines, members of the Montford Point Marine Assn., a group dedicated to preserving the legacy of the segregated boot camp in North Carolina where African American recruits were once trained.

Some 20,000 recruits were trained there from 1942 to 1949, when the U.S. military was ordered to be fully integrated.

"When I entered the Marine Corps, we didn't even have anyone ever reach the rank of staff sergeant," said Oscar Culp of Oceanside. "To now have a man commanding a division truly shows that America is a place where you can come from anywhere and reach the top."

Bailey, commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1977 after graduating from Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tenn., has held a series of command positions -- including, recently, command of the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego/Western Recruiting Region.

In a speech to an assemblage of friends, family members and Marines, Bailey acknowledged the legacy of the Montford Point Marines and also thanked various officers who provided guidance as he rose through the ranks. "I stand on your shoulders," he said.

To the thousands of Marines, Bailey promised "a full measure" of effort: "We love to fight and we love to win."

Bailey assumes command at a time of a draw-down of U.S. forces in Afghanistan and a reduction in the size of the Marine Corps. "Regardless of what the requirement, the 1st Division will be prepared," he told reporters.

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Numerous Montford Point Marines from the San Diego and Los Angeles Chapter's attended General Bailey's Change of Command ceremony.