



The Montford Point Marines Congressional Gold Medal/Certificate of Status Award Ceremony

In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802 allowing African Americans to be recruited in the United States Armed Forces. For the first time in Marine Corps history, African American recruits would be afforded the opportunity to receive training to become United States Marines.

It was August 26 1942, approximately 70 years ago, the first African American would report to a segregated training base which was then called Camp Montford Point. From 1942-1949, approximately 20,000 African American recruits trained at the designated base in the rural town of Jacksonville, NC., adjacent to the Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune.

Of those 20,000 who trained at Camp Montford Point, well over 13,000 served overseas during World War II. Most were assigned to ammunition and Depot companies and charge with the duties of carrying ammunition and supplies to the front lines and to return the wounded and dead to the transport ships.

In July of 1948, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981 negating segregation and in September 1949, Montford Point was deactivated ending seven years of segregation. In 1974, Montford Point Camp was renamed to Camp Johnson, in honor of Sergeants Major, Gilbert (Hashmark) Johnson, who was one of the 1st Black Marine Drill Instructors and the first African American Marine to serve 30yrs of active military service. To date, this base is the first and only Marine Corps Installation to be named after an African American Marine.

The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest civilian honor bestowed by congress for distinguished achievement. The President of the United States, President Barack Obama signed into law the legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the Montford Point Marines on 23 November 2011. This award recognizes the Montford Point Marines' contributions to the Marine Corps and the United States of America.

At the call of the nation, African American men had the courage to accept a challenge that would change the course of history. They were unique men who would pave the way and blaze the trail for tens of thousands of Americans to follow. They were men who came from all walks of life; men who had to fight for the right to fight. They were true heroes who would go on to fight at Iwo Jima, Okinawa, Saipan, and the Marinas Islands just to name a few. Some even paid the ultimate sacrifice by laying down their lives for this country and fellow Marines during a time of adversity and despondency when they were neither accepted by the Marines Corps nor their own country for which they served. They endured racial discrimination and disrespect because of the color of their skin. These men fought and died for their country while at war. Despite their disparate treatment these men proved themselves worthy of the title, Marine.

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The sacrifice of these men paved the way for other minorities and all women to be integrated into the Marine Corps. By their sacrifice, the Montford Point Marines engineered social and cultural change in the Marine Corps that created a lasting impact and has contributed to the success of the United States Marine Corps today.

*After WWII approximately 1,500 Montford Point Marines left the Marine Corps and resumed their civilian lives and occupation. They used the leadership and training experiences learned in the Marine Corps to integrate society and transition to productive successful citizens. The United States did not begin to end legally sanctioned segregationist laws (Jim Crow laws) until 1954 with the Supreme Court case of *Brown v Board of Education for the City of Topeka, Kansas* which ended the policy of "Separate but Equal" racial segregation of secondary schools in the United States. Many Montford Point Marines were leaders in the American civil rights movement. Their successes outside the Marine Corps are just as much a part of the Marine Corps legacy as their service within the Corps.*

There are well over 564 documented Montford Point Marines still living. About 434 OMPM's were in attendance in Washington, DC for the Congressional Gold Medal awarding ceremony. There are nearly 40 family members and next of kin of Montford Point Marines who accepted the Congressional Gold Medal on behalf of the Montford Point Marine who died since 23 November 2011, the date that the President signed the bill into law awarding the Congressional Gold Medal to the Montford Point Marines.

The Congressional Gold Medal was awarded to the Montford Point Marines on 27 June 2012, at the Capital Visitors Center, Washington, DC in Emancipation Hall. With the completion of this initiative, it will forever serve as a fitting symbol honoring the legacy of African American Marines and the effect of Executive Order #8802 which allowed Blacks to be recruited in the United States Marine Corps. It will also serve as a reminder of historical proud lineage as Marines, and to honor the 20,000 African American Marines who trained on the segregated hallowed grounds of Camp Montford Point and on to fight for the "Right to Fight" in World War II. The Congressional Gold Medal serves to honor and solidify the dedication, perseverance, and bravery of the Montford Point Marines.

A special thanks and sincere gratitude is extended to following for their dedication to the cause of preserving the legacy of the Montford Point Marines. This initiative would not have taken place if not for your combined efforts:

- The Montford Point Marine Association Incorporated*
- United States Marine Corps*
- 112th Congress*