



MESSAGE FROM THE VEEP



My Tribute to a Montford Pointer

September 2012

By Clarence M. Hatcherson

At the risk of committing the first of the Seven Deadly Sins, there have been several events in my life where I have “burst with pride”. One of those events was on my return from Vietnam. After an 18 hour flight from Okinawa, the Pan Am 707 returned us to “The World” with a smooth landing at El Toro Marine Corps Air Station shortly after sunset; the day was Wednesday March 12, 1969. When we disembarked the plane, there was a red carpet leading from the stairs of the plane to the Customs area and The Marine Corps Air Station Band was playing the Marine Corps Hymn. After 13 months of wondering if I’d ever get back home and then the last 18 hours of wondering if home would be the same, it is no small wonder that one would swell with pride at such a reception.

Another more recent committal of the first of the Seven Deadly Sins was on Thursday June 28, 2012. On that day the Montford Point Marines were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal. I take pride in personally knowing and being affiliates of several of these fine men.

There was one Original “Montford Pointer” however that was not able to attend the presentation ceremony; one whom I’d never met or remembers ever meeting, that had a much more significant impact on my life than either he or I was even aware until quite recently. His name is Mr. Harold S. Broussard and he is a native of Franklin, LA and he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps and trained at Camp Montford Point in 1942...six years prior to my birth.

The South in the 40’s was legally segregated; schools, eating establishments, public transportation. Once Mr. Broussard enlisted in the Marine Corps, he probably traveled to North Carolina by train; in the car designated for people of color. Once

arriving in North Carolina he underwent recruit training at Camp Montford Point, the training facility for “colored Marines”. Mr. Broussard went on to serve in World War II with the 7th Ammunition Company [11th Depot Company] on the Island of Peleliu; he also did duty on Guam and Saipan.

In 1946 Mr. Broussard was discharged from the Marine Corps; he returned to Franklin and, as most veterans of that era did, picked up and proceeded

with his life. I think that he never realized or even pondered on what a phenomenal impact he had made or what doors he and his fellow Montford Pointers had

opened for those like me, when he stepped off that train back in Franklin in 1946.



Federal legislation had changed the South in the mid 60’s. Interstate transportation was no longer segregated, but some institutions were still separate, like the schools, and there was still much de facto segregation; but the military was completely integrated. In September of 1967 I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. I do not know why I enlisted in the Marine Corps; I’d only known one Marine at that time; he was killed in Vietnam several months earlier and I was not aware that anyone else in Franklin had ever served in the Marine Corps. But on Thursday September 28, 1967, my mother, sister and young brother took me down to the bus station where I boarded a Greyhound bus bound for New Orleans.

The next day we were sworn in, issued orders, shuttled to New Orleans International Airport where we boarded our flight to Lindbergh Field in San Diego and on to MCRD to take my first and most memorable step that every future Marine must painfully take. Marine Corps boot camp, unlike Montford Point was integrated; in fact, the Drill Instructors took great pains in reminding all of us that, *“You are all nothing...you are lower than whale crap...and that’s at the bottom of the ocean.”*

There was one incident however, that brought back to me, with extreme clarity how race is so woven into our American fabric. Upon completion of training, in February 1968, I received orders to FMF WestPac; 1st MarDiv; 5th Marine Regiment, Da Nang, South Viet Nam. On the evening of April 7, 1968 while serving as an Infantryman with “Hotel Company” at the An Hoa Combat Base, our company Gunny called our platoon to formation; he then said or rather, barked in the customary manner of a Gunnery Sgt.

“I have the duty of informing you that Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated; there has been some rioting at home; I just want you to remember one thing...you are all Marines and YOU WILL conduct yourselves accordingly... DISSSS...MISSED!!!”

No matter where you came from or what your background was, in that moment there was no interpreting what the Gunny said and meant.

I think that it was at that moment that I realized that I had not just *“gone into the service”*; I was a part of a brotherhood called the United States Marines. What I did not know at that time was that it was men like Mr. Harold S. Broussard of Franklin, LA who paved the way for people of color to, by virtue of their personal character, earn the right to membership into this brotherhood...and on this past July 28, 2012

the Congress of the United States officially recognized and honored Mr. Broussard and all of those men who became the first Marines of color at Camp Montford Point.

I began this at the risk of committing the first of the Seven Deadly Sins-Pride; I shall close with an attempt to atone for this sin with the first of the Seven Sacred Virtues-Humility; to Mr. Broussard and to all of the Original Montford Pointers...I extend my most humble gratitude and I salute you.

Mr. Broussard was not able to attend the medal presentation ceremony in Washington, DC in July, however his family organized a medal presentation ceremony at his home in Franklin, LA; and on August 8, 2012 representatives from a nearby Marine Corp Reserve Unit along with family, friends and a host of local veterans who followed the trail that he blazed officially presented Montford Point Marine Harold S. Broussard of Franklin, LA the United States of America Congressional Gold Medal.

“Some people spend an entire lifetime wondering if they’ve made a difference. The Marines don’t have that problem.” -Author Unknown



L-R: Rev. Timothy Boyd Jr./USA Vietnam, Donaldson Bowles Jr./USMC Vietnam, Gregory Paul/USMC Vietnam, Granderson D. Hamilton/USMC Vietnam Era, Willie Rack/USMC Vietnam, Herman Hamilton/ USAF Vietnam, Albert Alexander/ USA Vietnam, Mr. Harold S. Broussard Sr. Montford Point Marine(uniformed Marines not identified)



Clarence Hatcherson is Vice-President of the Montford Point Marine Association L. A. Chapter 8