

MASTER GUNNERY SERGEANT JOSEPH H. GEETER III

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY WITH THE MONTFORD POINT MARINES

Joseph (Joe) H. Geeter III officially began to be involved in the Montford Point Marine Association in 1987 when he was serving as a US Marine canvassing recruiter in his hometown of Chicago, IL. Joe and his fellow recruiters often performed color guard duties at the Montford Point Clubhouse in Chicago when one day prominent Original Montford Pointer Sol Griffin “encouraged” him to join the Chicago Chapter. Joe continued to learn more about the great history of these forgotten World War II heroes and quickly decided to get more involved in their quest for wider recognition.



Upon reporting for duty at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, California in July 1991, Joe quickly was connected to the San Diego Chapter of the Montford Point Marines. Now being mentored by the likes of former 1stSgt Barnett Person, Iwo Jima survivor US Navy Captain Thomas McPhatter (deceased) and deceased Sergeant Major Augustus (Gus) Willis, Joe continued to learn more about these heroes and get more involved often using his Active Duty Marine duties as Depot Logistics Chief to assist the Montford Pointers and other Veterans groups with their Mission.

During the 1992 San Diego National Convention of the Montford Pointers, Joe began to meet the senior leadership of the Association to include founder retired Master Gunnery Sergeant Brooks Gray who immediately took Joe under his wing and educated him further on the history of the Association.

Joe transferred to Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort following an overseas tour in 1995 and was quickly recruited into the Beaufort Chapter by then National Vice President and Beaufort Chapter President Elijah “Gunny” Abram. Gunny Abram was rebuilding the Beaufort Chapter of the Montford Pointers and “persuaded” Joe to get more involved. Joe served as the Chapter Historian and Special Projects Officer in the Beaufort Chapter from 1995-2001.

During this period Joe continued to be mentored by Brooks Gray and Joe was the principal organizer of what would be regarded as the most memorable and productive Spring Council in the Association's history. In 1999 then National President Samuel Saxton wanted the Spring Council on the East Coast. The 1999 convention was scheduled to be held in Las Vegas Nevada and traditionally the Spring Council is held in the same city as the National Convention.

President Saxton realized the Original Montford Pointers, now mostly in their late 70s and early 80s, could not make a cross country trip twice to Las Vegas in 5 months so Sam Saxton directed that this Spring Council be held in Beaufort, South Carolina. Gunny Abram and Joe met with the then Commanding General of Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Brigadier General James R. Battaglini, to seek out logistical support for this event.

General Battaglini acknowledged that he knew little about the Montford Pointers but pledged to accommodate in any way his office could. After leaving the General a plethora of information, to include a documentary about the Montford Pointers, General Battaglini arranged for a second meeting where he pledged to make every department needed available to make this an historic event. General Battaglini arranged for his transportation division to assist in the shuttling of attendees from the various airports and train depots; allowed those who wanted to billet in the housing aboard the depot; arranged for complete training and audio visual support; hosted a reception after Friday Morning Colors for the leadership of the Association and arranged for the Montford Pointers to be the honored guest at the Friday morning recruit graduations.

The Montford Pointers even formed a platoon and marched for the reviewing portion of the recruit graduation, marking the very first time some of these Montford Pointers had the honor and privilege to march on the parade deck at Parris Island, South Carolina. The General even served as the guest speaker for the Spring Council Dinner held at the enlisted club aboard Parris Island. It was during this incredible event that then Marine Staff Sergeant, Glynis A. Harvey presented her historic poem "Montford Point Remembered" to the Association. Many giants of the Association were in attendance to include; founder Brooks Gray, Iwo Jima Survivor 1stSgt Ellis Cunningham, Past National President Gene Doughty, Past National President Jerome Millburn, Sergeant Major, James McCargo, the second African American Marine to be promoted to Sergeant Major from 1st Sergeant and many, many others. Joe served as Master of Ceremonies for the Spring Council Dinner and this is where he came to the attention of many National Officers as an up and coming Association Member. After this historic Spring Council, National President Sam Saxton tapped Joe for a series of special projects that Sam needed an active duty Marine to assist in leading, to include the proper burial of three Montford Pointers whose remains were recently discovered on the island of Okinawa, Japan.

Soon after his retirement from the Marines, after 25 years of active duty, in June of 2001, Joe was appointed at the National Quartermaster for the group, a post previously not occupied for a few years. Joe quickly developed this position as the go to position to ensure members had the proper uniform items to look professional at their meetings. Joe also worked with National Financial Secretary David Fortune to produce and sell blankets with the MPMA logo for profit. Joe also worked with National Webmaster, former Master Gunnery Sergeant Gilbert Taylor, to develop a series of coins that were also sold for profit to assist in the operating of the National Office.

In the spring of 2003 Joe was encouraged by many to seek the office of National Vice President at the National Convention in Detroit, Michigan. Joe was overwhelmingly elected National Vice President and immediately used his office to write letters to many prominent Americans to ensure the Montford Point Story was told. These efforts directly led to the small inclusion of African Americans Marines in the Clint Eastwood Film "*Flags of Our Fathers*" which the lack of the depiction of African Americans was noted by film director Spike Lee.

During the dedication of the Master Gunnery Sergeant Brooks E. Gray Consolidated Academic Instruction Facility at Camp Gilbert H. Johnson (formerly Montford Point) in Jacksonville, North Carolina in April 2005 Joe was strongly recruited by many original Montford Pointers to seek the highest office in the Association, National President. After deep consideration, Joe decided it was time to run for this office. During the 2005 National Convention in his hometown of Chicago, current three term National President, Nathaniel James conceded the election on the first day of the Convention and the path was laid for Joe to become the 16th National President of the Montford Point Marine Association.

During his two terms of office (2005-2009) Joe called on many old friends to seek out or be appointed to Chapter and National Offices. During Joe's (and Vice President L.E "Mike" Johnson's) administration; the Montford Point Uniform was standardized, four new Chapters were stood up (Mobile, Alabama, Boston, MA, Cherry Point, North Carolina and Warner Robbins, GA) and three were revitalized (Quantico, Virginia, Atlanta and Albany, GA) and came back into the National fold. The webpage was greatly expanded and utilized under Gilbert Taylor's expertise, The National Museum, under the leadership of Finney Greggs, was greatly expanded and funds were allocated for its upkeep, the documentary film (which began under Nathaniel James' administration) was completed and debuted at the 2006 National Convention with Academy Award winning actor Louis Gossett Jr in attendance. Mr. Gossett lent his time and voice to this incredible documentary. Through his contacts with the senior African American leadership in the Marine Corps, Joe arranged for the Commandant of the Marines Corps, General James T. Conway, to be the guest speaker at the 2008 National Convention in Houston, Texas. This convention opened many doors for the Montford Pointers to include the display of Montford Pointers at the Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico Virginia.

It was during Joe's second term that original Montford Pointer James "Rudy" Carter, upon hearing the Tuskegee Airmen were to be awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, challenged Joe to seek similar recognition for the Montford Pointers. Knowing that this would take great effort, Joe began in earnest mentoring then Senior Regional Vice President James Averhart to run for National President in 2009 which would allow Joe to work full time on seeking the Congressional Gold Medal for the Montford Pointers. James Averhart was elected 17th National President at the Montford Point National Convention in St Louis in 2009 and immediately appointed Joe as the National Legislative Officer and National Public Relations Officer to begin the long journey to lobby for the Congressional Gold Medal for the Montford Pointers.

Through the help of then Florida State Senator Anthony "Tony" Hill Joe secured a few minutes at the 2007 Congressional Black Caucus in Washington, DC where Joe shared his vision of the Congressional Gold Medal to many members of the Congressional Black Caucus to include US Congresswoman Corrine Brown, who upon hearing the Montford Point Marine story through Joe's presentation and the personal testimony of five Montford Pointers, agreed to sponsor legislation for the Congressional Gold Medal. Joe, along with Montford Point Marine Lieutenant Colonel Joseph H. Carpenter went about lobbying the US Congress for five years making many, many trips to Washington, DC knocking on doors and attending many events to get the Montford Point story out to members of Congress. Through Joe's initiative and the incredible help of Congresswoman Corrine Brown and the former Commandant of the Marine Corps, James Amos, the 112th Congress overwhelmingly passed the bill written by Joe and President Barrack Obama signed this bill into law in November 2011.

While lobbying for the Congressional Gold Medal, Joe met and befriended Hollywood Actor John Amos. Mr. Amos took an immediate interest in the Montford Pointers and along with his son KC, produced a documentary film that detailed the Montford Point Marines contributions to the World War II Iwo Jima Campaign. Mr. Amos also lent his voice for 11 Public Service Announcements that helped to bring the story of the Montford Pointers to the masses via the Montford Point webpage. For his efforts, John Amos was the recipient of the National Presidents Special Award at the 2011 National Convention in Atlanta, Georgia.

Upon retirement for the Marine Corps in 2001, Joe moved to the Philadelphia area to begin his second career as and Human Resource Manager for AmeriGas Propane. Joe immediately joined the Philadelphia Chapter of the Montford Point Marines and served in many capacities to include Special Projects Officer, where Joe arranged for three highly successful Chapter events to celebrate the Marine Corps' Birthday.

In January 2014 after the announcement that the current Philadelphia Chapter President was not going to seek further office, Joe again was encouraged to run for office, this time as Chapter President. Since taking office in January 2014, Joe has led the Chapter to revitalize its Ladies Auxiliary under the leadership of the daughter (Dr. Diane Turner) of original Montford Pointer Corporal Thomas Turner.

Joe has also started a “Care and Comfort Committee” whose duties include visitation for ailing Montford Pointers and proper representation at funerals of deceased members. Joe continues to lead his Chapter while serving as the National Public Relations Officer and writing the Quarterly National Newsletter that is mailed to approximately 1300 members.

Throughout his incredible 27 years of service to the Montford Pointers, Joe has served at every imaginable level within the Montford Point Marine Association and has mentored dozens of current and past National and local Officers. Joe’s basement in his home is a virtual museum of information and artifacts about the Montford Pointers and Joe has opened his home to members and scholars for research about these now more recognized American Pioneers.

Joe has been recognized of his efforts on many levels to include; A Special Presidents Award from the Montford Point National President (Sam Saxton), the prestigious James Calendar Award for his work on a National level for Montford Point, induction into the Montford Point Hall of Fame in 2010 and the oral recording of his life’s work by ***THE HISTORY MAKERS*** whose collection now is within the Library of Congress.

For more information about the Montford Point Marines, please visit their website at;

www.montfordpointmarines.org

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