World War II Montford Point Marine statues arrive to Camp Lejeune

CAMP LEJEUNE, Onslow County

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A World War II anti-aircraft gun and statue of a Montford Point Marine will be delivered to the National Montford Point Memorial construction site in Lejeune Memorial Gardens Wednesday, that's according to a release from the base.

The statue is to be delivered at approximately 11 a.m. according to Houston Shinal, National Montford Point Marine Memorial Project Director.

A news release went on to describe that the 90-mm M1A1 anti-aircraft gun was the primary anti-aircraft weapon used by the 51st and 52nd defense battalions of the Montford Point Marines, the first African-American recruits admitted to the Marine Corps during WWII. It is currently located on the grounds of the National Montford Point Marine Museum aboard Camp Johnson.

The M1A1 was delivered to the Museum April 12, 2013, from New Windsor, Md. The gun commemorates the legacy of the first African-American Marines who trained at the segregated Montford Point Marine recruit camp, according to officials at Camp Lejeune.
From 1942-49, 20,000 black Marine recruits trained at the all-black boot camp. African-Americans were not permitted to train at recruit depots in San Diego or Parris Island until 1949. The National Montford Point Marine Association, Inc. launched a 2-year search for the weapon. Less than 10 M1A1s are believed to still exist.
The anti-aircraft weapon was found in 2012 in Tennessee via an Internet search. It was purchased by the National Montford Point Marine Association for $15,000 from gun collector Robert Nitsche of Whites Creek, Tenn.
The M1A1 was used extensively throughout the Pacific Theater during WWII. The ones Montford Pointers trained on were less than optimal.

Pointers assigned to the 51st and 52nd defense battalions learned to maneuver and fire the 90 mm with exceptional accuracy, Shinal added, allowing them to exceed many standing range records. Montford Pointers eloquently dubbing the M1A1 weapon system the "Lena Horne" after the popular entertainer and civil activist because when fired, the gun made beautiful rhythmic sounds as it completed its firing cycle.

"The erection of the monument is our No. 1 priority," said Dr. James T. Averhart, national MPMA president. "I welcome the inclusion of the 90 mm M1A1 anti-aircraft gun which is an iconic piece of the Montford Point Marines legacy."

It took 10 hours to transport the 9.5 (10) ton M1A1 to Camp Johnson by trailer.

In addition to the M1A1, the memorial will also include a "Wall of Stars" representing the 20,000 Montford Point Marines and a statue of a Montford Pointer putting down a supply ammo pack and picking up a rifle marking the transition from performing support supply roles to combat. It will also incorporate three concentric rings representing the Marine Corps, the Montford Point Marines and the segregated society of the 1940s. "Not only have we procured the gun," Houston said, "We also have initiated the contracts to develop the sculpture (for the statue) another of the major elements of the project which will go in the west ring."

The Montford Point Marine Association contracted Icon Statues founder Robert Talbot who has collaborated with artist Stan Watts, creator of the 40-foot bronze memorial "To Lift a Nation," to honor the heroes of September 11, 2001. The three-times life-size statue, recreates the now-famous photo taken by Thomas E. Franklin, a photographer for the Bergen Record, who captured the image of three firefighters raising the American flag at Ground Zero. The Montford Point Marine Memorial Project is estimated to cost $2 million. Some $838,000 has been raised. Describing the project as "primarily a grass-roots effort," Averhart said the association is seeking financial support from members, families, friends and corporate sponsors.

The association still needs about $800,000 for the memorial. To learn more about making a donation, visit their website.   Full Story