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Montford Point

Marine Association, Inc.



Long overdue glory for Montford Point Marines



Houston Shinal, left, National Monument Director, and Nathaniel James, a member of the Camp Lejeune chapter of the Montford Point Marines Association, stand at the site of the future Montford Point Marine Memorial at the Memorial Gardens in Jacksonville.

Press



Release

Long overdue glory for Montford Point Marines

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[LINDELL KAY - DAILY NEWS STAFF](#)

Recent recognition for the country's first black Marines is appreciated by the local chapter of the Montford Point Marines — particularly in the hopes that interest it generates will help raise funds for a planned monument in slumping economic times.

The nation's first black Marines received a rare national tribute last week when the U.S. House voted to award them with the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor given by Congress.

Simultaneously, the challenges faced by the original Montford Point Marines are being incorporated into physical training that pays homage to sacrifices by past Marines.

Sacrifice is something the Montford Point Marines know a lot about.

Black Marines were trained at a segregated boot camp, Montford Point, adjacent to [Camp Lejeune](#) and now known as Camp Johnson.

Turner Blount, an original Montford Point Marine and former Jacksonville councilman, attested Friday to the harsh conditions of the basic training he and other original Montford Point Marines received.

Sometimes the treatment by fellow Marines was harsher. Black Marines were not allowed to enter Camp Lejeune unless accompanied by a white officer. Whenever they participated in training exercises, they could not eat until the white Marines had finished. They were routinely passed over for promotions.

Turner said the recognition was a long time coming — it has been 70 years since the Marine Corps became the last military branch to accept blacks after being ordered to do so by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Blount said it was good to see; but felt a little late.

"It's a blessing to live to see it," he said.

Blount's wife, Sadie, said she knew of about half a dozen original Montford Point Marines living in the area, all of whom are shut-ins and have not been able to make it to recent ceremonies.

About 20,000 men trained at Montford Point between 1942 and 1949. There are only about 700 alive today, said retired Sgt. Maj. Nathaniel James, past president of the national Montford Point Marines Association and current president of the local chapter No. 10.

He said the national attention couldn't have come at a better time for the lodge, which is struggling to raise funds for a planned monument in the Jacksonville Memorial Gardens to honor the original Montford Point Marines.

"It makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up when you think of what all those original Montford Point Marines went through," James said. "They were treated like second-class citizens and given second-class treatment and they proved everyone wrong."

James said all of his accomplishments and anything achieved by blacks in the military was due to the fact they were standing on the shoulders of the Montford Point Marines, Tuskegee Airmen and Buffalo Soldiers. But the others have gained recognition, and now it's time for the Montford Point Marines to be recognized.

History books and Hollywood have chronicled the Army's Buffalo Soldiers and the Army Air Corps' Tuskegee Airmen, but the men who integrated the Marines during World War II have been mostly overlooked. That is starting to change, beginning with the House's unanimous 422-0 vote to award the group the Gold Medal.

Rep. Walter Jones, R-N.C., said he hoped that awarding the medal to the Montford Point Marines would "soothe the pain of yesterday with the glory of today."

James said he hoped the attention would help bring all the remaining original Montford Point Marines together in Jacksonville next year.

He said the lodge plans to have the first phase of the monument built in Memorial Gardens by Aug. 26, which has been designated Montford Point Marine Day by the state. The organization's national conference is set to be held in Jacksonville at that time to coincide with the special day.

To donate to the memorial fund, send checks payable to Montford Point Marine Association Monument Fund to National Financial Secretary, P.O. Box 1070 Sharon Hill, PA 19079. For more information call the local chapter at 910-347-3896.