



Press



Release

## Bereavement Announcement



**Mr. John "Zeke" Clouser**

November 13, 1921 - May 21, 2016

MSgt (USMC) Ret

It is with deep personal sadness that I announce the passing of Original Montford Point Marine Master Sergeant John "Zeke" Clouser. Zeke was one of the last surviving Founding Fathers of the Montford Point Marine Association. Zeke Clouser was instrumental with Brooks Gray and others to form the Association in 1965 and served as its first Special Projects Officer.

His innovativeness led to the raising of over one million dollars for the Association through the Queen's Contest in the 19 years he held this position. The Queen's Contest still raises thousands of dollars each year for the association today. Throughout his fifty-year membership with the Association, Zeke has served in numerous positions within the local Chapter to include assistant building manager at the Philadelphia clubhouse.

Zeke led the clubhouse to many years of profitability for the Philadelphia Chapter. Wherever Zeke focused his attention, that area flourished financially and brought goodwill to our Association. Zeke continued to faithfully attend meetings until his relocation to Galveston, Texas a few years ago. At the Philadelphia meetings, Zeke often served as the wise council to younger members and reached out to members who no longer can make meetings.

Zeke was voted into the Montford Point Marine Hall of Fame in 2006 and was the recipient of the Congressional Gold Medal in June 2012.

Zeke was determined to make our last two conventions in New Orleans, Louisiana and Mobile, Alabama to once again huddle with his old friends.

A Marine to the very end, Zeke died comfortably in his sleep at age 94. Funeral services are pending. Notes of condolence may be sent to Laurie Clouser at; 2802 Avenue North, Galveston, Texas 77550 4359

Joseph H. Geeter III  
MPMA National Public Relations and Legislative Officer





# Honors are on the way for the country's first black Marines



*Six of the Montford Point Marines who served in World War II: (from left, clockwise) Max Daniels, 94; Alfred Brown, 87; Gilmon Brooks, 86; Joseph Ginyard, 87; Phillip Herout, 84; and John Clouser, 90.*

**By Vernon Clark, Inquirer Staff Writer**

**POSTED: FEBRUARY 15, 2012**

At boot camp, they endured snakes, mosquitoes, substandard housing, and intense physical training.

In the South Pacific, they faced the Japanese. Yet, through World War II and beyond, these 19,000 black men also confronted segregation and racism to serve as U.S. Marines.

They are the Montford Point Marines, named for the segregated facility where they were trained in North Carolina from 1942 until 1949.

This spring, these first black Marines - about 400 who are still alive - will be honored at the U.S. Capitol Visitors Center in Washington with the Congressional Gold Medal, the country's highest civilian honor for distinguished achievement. There are 10 living Montford Point Marines in the Philadelphia area, officials said.

"It makes me proud to be a part of this history, said John "Zeke" Clouser, 90, of Philadelphia, a former drill instructor, who served from 1943 to "the last day of 1965."

"Nowadays, most of the blacks in the Marine Corps, they didn't know about us. We were the pathfinders. I'm one of those who paved the way for them," Clouser said during a recent meeting of the Philadelphia chapter of the Montford Point Marine Association, a fraternal organization dedicated to preserving the legacy of the first black Marines.





Clouser was among the men who broke the color barrier in the last branch of the service to admit blacks.

In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order that banned race-based exclusion from employment in the military and defense industries.

The measure opened the door for blacks to join the Marines, which then adopted a policy of strict racial segregation.

The next year - in the midst of World War II - the Marine Corps built a training base for blacks at Montford Point on land about five miles from all-white Camp Lejeune near Jacksonville, N.C.

The men were housed in huts made of corrugated metal on land infested with snakes and mosquitoes.

"They had green huts with no toilets. They had to walk up the street for the toilet. No running water," said Joe Geeter, national public relations officer for the Montford Point Marine Association, who lives in Limerick, Pa.

The early Montford Point Marines, about 13,000, served in the Pacific Theater, on Iwo Jima, Guam, Saipan, Okinawa, and other islands. Many were assigned to guard duty. Others were members of segregated ammunition and depot companies, led by white officers. Those units delivered munitions and supplies to front-line troops. Thirteen Montford Point Marines were killed in World War II. The Marines became fully integrated during the 1950s.

In a December letter to the Marine Corps, announcing President Obama's signing of a bill to award the Congressional Gold Medal, Gen. James F. Amos, commandant of the Marine Corps, hailed the Montford Point Marines.

"These men served in battle, provided critical supplies to those on the front lines and evacuated the wounded to safety," Amos said. "They did their jobs with professionalism and ably proved their courage in epic battles of the Pacific like Saipan, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa."

Amos said these leathernecks "carried their exceptional strength of character" to their lives after the service, becoming mayors, ministers, lawyers, physicians and educators. Some integrated the nation's shipyards, he said.

"Their legacy of courage and perseverance is an inspiration to all Marines," Amos said. The Montford Point Marines will be honored at the Black Engineer of the Year Awards' Annual Stars and Stripes Dinner on Friday at 7 p.m. in the Grand Ballroom of the Marriott Philadelphia Downtown. A Marine official said Amos was expected to attend.

A few prominent black leaders in Philadelphia were Montford Point Marines.

Among them are the late Cecil B. Moore, former City Councilman, lawyer and civil rights activist, who was a drill sergeant; Floyd Alston, former president of the Philadelphia Board of Education and founder of Beech Interplex, a North Philadelphia community development corporation, a sergeant; and William T. "Mr. C" Carney, acclaimed drummer and jazz band leader, a private first class.

Asked about his time in the Marines, Carney, known for his work with his late wife, organist Trudy Pitts, and other key Philadelphia musicians, said his experience was both good and bad.

"It depends on your nature and attitude. You can take anything and make it negative or positive," Carney said. "It pays to make it positive."





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He said his time on the aircraft carrier USS Hornet in the Pacific and his Montford Point training "made me be more profound in life. I had some proud moments.

"When I came home on liberty, black folks would be looking at me, and kids wanted to touch my uniform because they hadn't seen any black Marines," Carney said.

The Philadelphia area is home to 10 Montford Point Marines.

They are Floyd Alston of Philadelphia; Willie Brown of Philadelphia; William T. "Mr. C" Carney of Philadelphia; John "Zeke" Clouser of Philadelphia, Max Daniels of Belmawr, N.J.; Phillip Herout of Philadelphia; Joseph Ginyard of Philadelphia; Wesley Lowery of New Castle, Del.; Thomas Turner of Devon; and Al Willis of Philadelphia.

Six of the 10 attended the January meeting of the Philadelphia chapter of the Montford Point Marine Association at the William P. Roche Post 21 of the American Legion at 64th Street and Paschall Avenue in West Philadelphia.

After the Saturday afternoon meeting, the men, all in their 80s and 90s, reflected on their experience in the Marines and on receiving the Congressional Gold Medal.

Gilmon Brooks, 86, of Tinton Falls, Monmouth County N.J., recalled being wounded by shrapnel in the Battle of Iwo Jima and watching six soldiers raise the United States Flag on Mount Suribachi on Feb. 23, 1945, in what would become an iconic image of U.S. military determination.

Brooks, a tall man with a voice soft and deep, said he was in an ammo company when the fighting erupted.

"We were servicing a tanker outfit coming in to pick up ammunition," Brooks said. "We had been working for a couple hours and everything got quiet. . . . We thought maybe the war was ending, it got so quiet.

"Then all hell broke loose with mortar fire and everything. My lieutenant got hit," said Brooks a retired sheriff's deputy. "Just as I saw him going down, I got hit."

Brooks said that later, on a train from California to the East Coast, he was the only black Marine on board. "I really felt like I was a real Marine," Brooks said.

Several of the men said they appreciated the Congressional Gold Medal recognition after the Army Air Corps' famed all-black Tuskegee Airmen, who served in World War II, were awarded the medal in 2007 and depicted in the recent film *Red Tails*.

Some of the Marines recalled the racial hostility they encountered traveling in the Jim Crow South and living in North Carolina.

"The bigotry was rampant," said Floyd Alston. "We were treated like dirt even though we were part of the United States Marine Corps. They didn't care about that. We were treated terribly."

Alston said the black Marines faced racism from whites and resentment from blacks in North Carolina.

He said blacks in North Carolina "thought we were kind of stupid for being there."

Thomas Turner said he also encountered racism from white Marines at Camp Lejeune.

"They didn't want us in the Marine Corps to begin with," Turner said. "Everywhere we went, they thought we were something strange. Some of them thought we were animals. When they got to meet us they found out it was a different story.





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Alfred Brown, 87, who was a corporal and served from 1943 to 1946, looked back on the hard work and tough training at Montford Point.

"I had Cecil B. Moore as a sergeant. He was tough, mean, and a Marine through and through. We hated him, and we loved him," Brown said. "Our jobs as privates was to do slave work. They didn't have any hours, just endless work until the work was complete."

Marine Col. Stephanie C. Smith, who is coordinating the project to recognize the Montford Point Marines, said plans call for the Congressional Gold Medal to be awarded in May, although no date has been set. She said President Obama would present the medal, schedule permitting.

Smith said only one gold medal would be minted and bronze replicas given to all living Montford Point Marines and to relatives of those who will have died between Nov. 23, 2011, when President Obama signed the law, and the date of the medal ceremony.

Those who do not meet those criteria can purchase replicas from the U.S. Mint web page beginning on the day of the ceremony, Smith said.

Although the Montford Point Marines faced segregation, they helped transform race relations in America, Smith said.

"The triumphant story is their perseverance and their courage despite this tragic history," Smith said. "It's what they became and what they did for our society . . . for racial integration in the United States, not just the U.S. military, not just the Marine Corps, but the United States."

