



**Ernest Alfred Smith, Jr.**, aged 91 was born in Harlem on November 6, 1922. He was the youngest child of Ernest A. Smith and Roslyn A. Sims Smith and the only child to be born outside of St. Elizabeth's Parish in Jamaica. He grew up during the Harlem

Renaissance and graduated from DeWitt Clinton High School in New York City.

On September 18, 1943, Ernest enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. The Marine Corps was the last of the armed services to integrate and basic training took place in the substandard barracks known as Montford Point located next to Camp Lejeune, NC. These first African-American Marines became known as Montford Point Marines. His experience with the southern Jim Crow laws and the unequal, segregated treatment by the Marine Corps changed his life forever. When being transported by train across the country to be shipped out during World War II, African-American troops were unable to purchase food or use restrooms except by going to the back doors of establishments. In contrast, white troops were fed and celebrated along the way. At one point his platoon was told to disembark the train and wait for the next one so that German prisoners of war could be transported instead. However, he was true to the Marine Corps motto and faithfully served his country in World War II. He was confirmed to have made a landing on the island of Saipan in the Pacific Theatre. He was honorably discharged on April 11, 1946 at the rank of Corporal. His older children grew up hearing the story of his taxi ride from North Carolina to Washington, DC where he could change to a desegregated train for the remainder of the journey home to New York.

After the war, Ernest created a path to further his education and avoid the competition with so many veterans using their GI benefits. He decided to attend college far away from the places he knew and enrolled in St. Dunstan's University in the smallest Canadian province of Prince Edward Island (PEI). He received his Bachelor's degree in 1951 and was the first African-American to attend and

graduate from the University (now a part of the University of Prince Edward Island). It was during his studies in Charlottetown, PEI that he would meet the love of his life Wanda A. MacPhee, a nursing student who completed her studies the same year. She immigrated to the US and they were married in 1952 in New York City. He went on to earn a Master's degree in Social Work from the University of Ottawa in 1954.

Ernie and Wanda moved to Goshen in 1954 finally being able to purchase a home as an interracial couple. This home on Hartley Road ultimately became a fortuitous opportunity to raise their large family in the country. Ernest had a successful career in social work and human service program administration retiring from the Catholic Charities Brooklyn Diocese. He received honors for his Brooklyn community-based work in 1976 and recognition from Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm. Previously, he was the first Director of Social Services at what was then the Pius XII School in Sugar Loaf, NY. He also taught as an adjunct professor at Rockland Community College. He was instrumental in helping to establish the foundation for what is now the Orange County Department of Mental Health and was a part-time family counselor there. He also served on a White House Committee on Aging during the Carter Administration. Ernest attended St. John the Evangelist Church in Goshen where he was a parishioner for 58 years. Ernest was a lifetime member of the New York Metro 3 Montford Point Marine Association. He enjoyed returning regularly to Prince Edward Island for vacation with family and visiting with many relatives, neighbors, and friends.

One of the most remarkable events in his life occurred when he, along with all of the surviving Montford Point Marines, was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in June of 2012. At age 89, he proudly attended the ceremony in Washington D.C. and was prouder still that his own daughter, Col. Stephanie C. Smith had served on special assignment for the Commandant of the Marine Corps to help make the Montford Point Marine medal a reality for all of those who served.