

Obituary

Johnnie Thompkins, Jr., age 86, went to meet his Lord on Wednesday, July 30, 2014. He was born in McCormick, South Carolina to the late Florie New Thompkins and Johnnie Thompkins, Sr. He grew up in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, attending and graduating from Atkins High School. He later attended Winston-Salem Teachers College. He was spiritually fed at New Bethel Baptist Church during his younger years. As a very young man, on September 10, 1946 he answered the country's call and joined the United States Marine Corps at a time when our society was deeply divided along racial lines. He was trained at Montford Point Camp, a facility set up exclusively for blacks during World War II when the Marine Corps was desegregated. He was honored to serve and had no idea that his service would make such a great contribution to United States history. He enjoyed talking about his experiences in the Marine Corps and about the places he served. From those experiences came a diversified life that he cherished.

Mr. Thompkins spent three years in Guam (1947-1949) and returned to the states in 1950, spending three years in Quantico, Virginia and five years at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. In 1958, he made a fourteen month tour in Okinawa, Japan and returned to Norfolk, Virginia in 1960. He later spent two years at Camp Geiger and was shipped back to Okinawa and did tours to Vietnam. Afterwards, he returned to Norfolk and officially retired from the United States Marine Corps on the first day of November 1974 with the rank of Master Sergeant. During his military assignment in Jacksonville in 1968 he met and married Ernell Fonville and made New Bern his home. They shared 44 happy years together until God called her home on May 17, 2013.

After making his home in New Bern, he joined First Missionary Baptist Church under the leadership of Rev. Charles Dickens. He was a devoted Deacon and Teacher of the adult Sunday school. He was a Life Member of the Montford Point Marine Association Camp Lejeune Chapter #10, George B. Willis Lodge # 423 and he also volunteered with Meals on Wheels. He also worked many years performing security at Weyerhaeuser. He enjoyed his church activities, family life, traveling and preserving his bond and memories with the Marine Corps.

In 2012, over 60 years after training at Montford Point Camp, Mr. Thompkins and his wife traveled to Washington D.C. where he, along with 367 other surviving Montford Point Marines were recognized by Congress with the nation's highest civilian honor, the Congressional Gold Medal for being the first African Americans to become Marines. This was a highlight of his life and anchored his role in the history of our nation's great Marine Corps. His other military accolades included:

the Good Conduct Medal with 6 Stars; Word War II Victory Medal; National Defense Service Medal; Vietnam Service Medal and the Meritorious Unit Citation. He was happiest when he fellowshipped with comrades which was evident by his infectious smile. He was a real tribute to the Marine Corps, his family and all who knew him.

He leaves to cherish his memories one son, Gary Thompkins of Winston-Salem; four daughters, Vanleader Thompkins of Seaside, California, Gwendolyn T. Thomas of Winston-Salem, Dionne T. Matthews (Leon) of Charlotte and Tammi J. Thompkins of New Bern; one brother, David Thompkins (Olivia) of Winston-Salem and one sister, Mary Taylor of Winston-Salem; six grandchildren, Xavier Thompkins, Tyler Thompkins, Justice E Matthews, Donna Thomas-Carter (Orlando), Timothy Parker (Kyja) and William Magnum, III; two great-grandchildren; cherished nieces and nephews and a host of cousins and friends.