



Obituary Announcement



LeRoy A. Mack, Sr.

Gunnery Sergeant (USMC Ret)

March 29, 1929 - August 17, 2014

WILMINGTON-LeRoy A. Mack, Sr. of Clarksville, TN received his last PCS orders on August 17, 2014 in Albany, GA. Gunnery Sgt. Mack was born on March 29, 1929 in Brooklyn, NY to Leroy and Margaret Black. He was a proud original Montford Point Marine. Mr. Mack is survived by his 5 children: Carolyn M. Chance (Tibbit) and Cynthia Johnson (Robert) of Wilmington, NC, Leroy A. Mack, Jr. (Shelly) of Tennessee, Larry Mack of Raleigh, NC and Sharon Hunt (Perry) of Wilmington, NC. A visitation with the family will be held at the home of Carolyn Chance on Sunday, August 24, 2014 from 4:30 PM - 6:30 PM. A memorial service will be held at St. Marks Episcopal Church located at 600 Grace St. on Monday, August 25, 2014 at 9:30 AM. The interment will be in the Wilmington National Cemetery immediately following the service. Condolences may be sent to Sharon.hunt@att.net. In lieu of flowers the family asks that you donate to the National Montford Point Marines Assoc.



Montford Point Marine shares segregation experience

by Michele Vowell, Courier assistant editor

“We tried our best to change things. What could we do? We were only a few. Mostly, we just endured.”

Retired Gunnery Sgt. Leroy Mack Sr. was one of the original Montford Point Marines – among the first African-Americans to serve in the United States Marine Corps.

Mack shared his story of service, sacrifice and segregation Tuesday at the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Special Emphasis Observance Luncheon at Cole Park Commons. Tuesday’s luncheon theme was “How the Military Helped to Usher in Civil Rights!” The event was sponsored by Fort Campbell’s Equal Employment Opportunity and Equal Opportunity offices.

It was the 1940s and segregation in the military had been the standard for nearly 200 years.



On June 25, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt would change that standard. He issued Executive Order 8802, which eliminated racial discrimination from federal departments, agencies, the military and from private defense contractors. For the first time, African Americans were permitted to join the Marine Corps. Mack was a top high school athlete in Long Island, N.Y., when he dropped out to serve his country as a Marine.

At that time, African-American recruits did not train with their white counterparts. Instead they were sent – usually in segregated rail cars or buses – to a separate camp at Montford Point, Jacksonville, N.C.

“We suffered hard because when we came to Montford Point, there was nobody but white officers, white NCOs and especially the drill instructors. Their job was to do two things: weed out the weak; build the strong,” Mack said. “This was a program that was under scrutiny. This was a program that, if it worked, we would reap the benefits. If it didn’t work, the Marine Corps was going back to all white.”

When World War II heated up overseas, white drill instructors returned to Camp Lejeune, N.C., and black drill instructors stepped in to train the recruits at Montford.

“Those days, the atmosphere was so tense,” Mack said. “When Montford Point became all black, it was worse than when the white drill instructors had us. Because they, the black instructors, wanted us to be better. You cannot just be equal to them, you’ve got to be better. We are under a microscope. If this plan works, we will be in the Marine Corps forever and a day. But, if it fails, you’re out. The Marine Corps would go back to the way it was ... We didn’t want that. We did everything we could.”

According to guides.grc.usmcu.edu/montford, “from 1942-1949, approximately 20,000 African-American men enlisted in the Marine Corps and completed segregated boot camp at Montford Point. Many of these Marines served with distinction during a number of World War II’s bloodiest struggles, making the ultimate sacrifice, while others continued their service into Korea and Vietnam.”

Mack, now 84, said many history books overlook the Montford Point Marines and their service. However, the USMC honored more than 400 of these service members with the Congressional Gold Medal on June 27, 2012. Mack has one of these medals and hopes that this group of Veterans will continue to be recognized.

“We were there,” he said. “We were at Guam. We were at Saipan. We were at Iwo,” he said. “There were 2,000 of us at Okinawa. We were part of the occupation forces at Japan. We guarded the coal trains in northern China. We helped to bring back Japanese forces that had surrendered. Ours is a history that needs to be told.”