

# Press



# Release

## Thomas S. Turner, Sr.

THOMAS "TOMMY" STRICKLAND TURNER, SR. was born May 16, 1925. He was raised on a 106 acre farm with his father, Edward Daniel Turner, mother, Maude Butler Turner, and ten siblings Edward Jr., Rosemarie, Evelyn, Leroy, Constance, Barbara, Francis, Jean, Hilda and Phyllis. Both of his parents were graduates of Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia, now known as Hampton University. The Turner farm became a gathering place where African Americans in the region held social events, including church picnics, Elks, jazz festivals and other functions.

Tommy and his siblings Constance, Barbara, Leroy and Francis were among the African American students who were barred from attending the new Easttown Elementary School in 1932. The discriminatory practices of attempting to institute segregation erupted into a fight for equal education for all students. Those involved in the struggle against segregation included local African American parents, the NAACP and Philadelphia lawyer, Raymond Pace Alexander. At that time, Tommy's uncle, Oscar B. Cobb, was the president of the NAACP. Through their courage and commitment to equal education for African American children, they were finally granted the right to enter and attend the new East town School.



Thomas S. Turner enlisted in the Marines on October 2, 1943 and was inducted on October 4, 1943. He was active in the Marines from 1943 to 1946. Corporal Turner was among the African American Marines who received their basic training at Montford Point, a segregated facility at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. Approximately 20,000 African American Marines received basic training at Montford Point between 1942 and 1949. During training, his outfit broke every record in the Marine Corps. Next, he was assigned to a ninety millimeter anti-aircraft, and again, under his assistance as the director guide, his outfit broke all of the records that had been set before them for heavy anti-aircraft.

It was not easy for Corporal Turner and other African American soldiers but they fought courageously and kept their dignity in spite of the discriminatory practices that they encountered in the U.S. Marines. Upon finishing Boot Camp at Montford Point at Camp Lejeune in January of 1944, he and twenty of his platoon were assigned to the 51st Defense Battalion, which manned the bigger guns that were heavy anti-aircraft and seacoast artillery. His platoon was combat ready and about to disembark from Montford Point, North Carolina to Camp Pendleton in California and to the Pacific Ocean theatre of World War II where they would spend two years on the islands in the Pacific and South Pacific. In the course of going through the South to California, they went in two groups.

The first group traveled with live ammunition. At several rest stops, they were involved in racial situations leading to the use of guns. Turner was part of the second group. They were not allowed amenities in route. With this action, his entire outfit served the rest of their time on probation. They were denied advances in ranks until returning to the states. After leaving Camp Pendleton, Corporal Turner embarked to the Ellice Islands in the South Pacific. He operated the big (90mm) guns on Funafuti for the next six months. He was then embarked to the Marshall Island Central Supply for the Pacific Ocean theatre of the war where he spent two years. He was on Eniwetok when the war ended in 1946.

As a veteran, Corporal Turner was able to further his education by enrolling in the Temple University Technical Division where he received a certificate in contracting and estimating. He established himself as a reputable contractor on the Main Line. For the past 30 years, Mr. Turner has been working in the service of the Lord at the First Baptist Church of Wayne, Pennsylvania. He served as the church carpenter, had membership in three choirs singing praises to the Lord, served as president of the Male Chorus for six years, member of the Pastor's Aide and received various awards for his faithful service. His favorite saying was "Give God the Glory and All the Praise."

Tommy enjoyed baking apple pies for different church activities and for different people by request. He was known for making an incredible strawberry shortcake. His other interests included gardening, playing the harmonica and most of all spending time with his family.

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He was a loving husband, father, grandfather and friend. On November 23, 2011, President Barack Obama signed HR 2447 and S 1527 awarding the Congressional Gold Medal to the Montford Point Marines.

On June 28, 2012, Corporal Turner attended the ceremony and received the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor along with his comrades. In May of 2013, Corporal Turner humbly accepted the honor of serving as Grand Marshal of the annual Radnor Township's Memorial Day Parade. He often commented that he knew that the Lord had placed all of this honor on him. He just completed a book with his daughter, Diane, entitled "Our Grand Pop is a Montford Point Marine" which is forth coming from Third World Press.

On August 15, 2013, surrounded by his family, Thomas S. Turner, Sr. took God's hand and peacefully transitioned from labor to rest. He leaves a legacy of treasured memories to his wife, Angeline Cropper Turner with whom he shared 52 years of marriage, nine children, Diane (Pedro Matos) Turner, Carole Burnett, Thomas Turner Jr., Deborah (Tony) Knight, Susan Cropper, Sandra (Carlton) Smith, Tammy (Mario) Ford, Timothy (Gamet) Turner and Theodore (Judith) Turner; three sisters, Constance Jackson, Barbara Rheubottom, Hilda Wright; two brother in laws, William Cropper, Jr. and Stanley Cropper; 22 grandchildren; 24 great-grandchildren and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, other relatives and friends. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Evelyn D. Wright; six siblings, Edward Jr., Rosemarie, Evelyn, Leroy, Jean, and Phyllis.