



## Flags to be lowered to honor Montford Point Marine

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After being presented with the Congressional Gold Medal, Montford Point Marine Thomas A. Byrdsong is congratulated by Lt. Gen. John M. Paxton Jr., commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Command. (Photo: Harry Gerwien/August 17, 2014)



NEWPORT NEWS -- State flags will be lowered to half staff in Newport News and at the capitol Friday in memory of Montford Point Marine Thomas A. Byrdsong.

According to his obituary, Byrdsong died October 3.

He was one of four Hampton Roads Montford Point Marines who received bronze replica Congressional Gold Medals during a ceremony in Chesapeake in August. That ceremony allowed the Marine Corps to honor the men who couldn't attend the June ceremony in Washington, D.C. that recognized their service.

African-American recruits weren't allowed to receive basic training at the traditional recruit depots of Parris Island or San Diego. They were segregated and received training at Montford Point, which was located at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

The Montford Point Marines were established in 1942 by President Franklin Roosevelt during World War II. About 20,000 blacks were trained at Montford Point between 1942 and 1949.

Byrdsong served from 1943 to 1946 and attained the rank of Corporal, according to the U.S. Marine Corps.





Thomas A. Byrdsong was born January 12, 1925 in Newport News, VA. He had one daughter, Sonya Lennon-Butler of Durham, NC. He departed this life on Friday, October 3, 2014 at Mary Immaculate Hospital in Newport News, VA.



In June of 2013, Thomas received the nation's highest civilian honor, the Congressional Gold Medal for being a member of the Montford Point Marines Tidewater 14 Chapter- the first blacks to serve in a reluctant Marine Corps. In 1992 he retired from NASA-Langley Research Center after 41 years of being an Aeronautical Engineer. He worked in the Transonic Dynamics Tunnel and with the Apollo program. He was also a Life Member alumnus of the University of Michigan's Engineering program. Thomas never met a stranger and always tried to help others.

Left to cherish his memory are his daughter, Sonya Lennon-Butler (Gerald); grandchildren, Sinclair Lennon (18 years old freshmen at UNC-Chapel Hill) and Jonathan Lennon, 12 years old; nephew, Clifton Lloyd Byrdsong; special great niece, Nadine Byrdsong of New Jersey; special cousins, Seena and Pete Guthrie of Newport News, VA; other relatives and friends.

A graveside service will be held 11 a.m., Wednesday, October 8, 2014 at Hampton Memorial Gardens, 155 Butler Farm Road, Hampton, VA 23666. There will be no viewing. Condolences may be sent to Sonya Lennon-Butler, 1101 Exchange Place, Apt. 431, Durham, NC 27713, (843) 283-9361, [sonya.lennon43@gmail.com](mailto:sonya.lennon43@gmail.com). O.H. Smith & Son Funeral Home is honored to serve the family.

