

THE MONTFORD POINT MARINES 1942 - 1949 *The First African - American Marines*

Change Comes to the Marine Corps
 African-Americans were prohibited from serving in the Marine Corps from its founding in 1775 until June 25, 1941, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 directing the Armed Forces of the United States to accept recruits "... regardless of color, race, creed, or national origin..." On June 1, 1942 the Marine Corps began to recruit qualified "colored male citizens of the United States between the ages of 17 and 29, inclusive, for service in a combat organization."



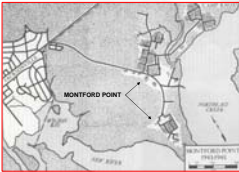
Montford Point Marines parade during World War II



Montford Point Camp as it appeared in 1943 with the "166 green hut" of the boot camp beyond the large building



Montford Point barracks in the Depot Post Marine Unit's area, CA, 1943.



MONTFORD POINT

The Montford Point Camp
 The Marine Corps established a separate and segregated cantonment at Camp Lejeune for the new African - American recruits called the Montford Point Camp. It was located at some distance from all the other training facilities at Camp Lejeune and made an indelible impression on the incoming recruits. Coming off Highway 24, a narrow road about a mile long led through a corridor of tall pine trees into a large clearing where there was, according to one of these new recruits:
 "... a headquarters building (#100), a chapel, two warehouses, a theatre building with two wings, which later housed a library, barber shop, [and] classification room on one side and a recreation slip chute (beer hall) on the other, a dispensary building, a mess hall, designated by the recruits as "The Greasy Spoon", quarters and facilities for the 325 personnel, a small steam generating plant, a small motor transport compound, a small officers' club, and 120 green prefabricated huts, each designed for billeting 16 men.

The Montford Point Training Program
 The training program began with boot camp and had as its ultimate objective the creation of a composite defense battalion. This combat unit was racially segregated but was commanded by white officers. While noncommissioned officers initially staffed the Montford Point units but they were replaced as soon as African-American replacements became available. The first promotions of African-Americans took place early in November 1942. A fully functioning cadre of African-American sergeants and corporals was created in a matter of months.



Mechanized warfare training in a light tank at Montford Point, April 1943.



Training in July for all Marines, April 1943



Montford Point Marines clear an obstacle during bayonet training, April 1945.



Combat training at Montford Point, 1944.

African-American Marine Corps Units of World War II
 The first African-American Marine Corps combat unit was the 51st Defense Battalion activated on August 18, 1942 at Montford Point. Shortly thereafter the Secretary of the Navy authorized a Marine Corps Mesanin Branch and the first of 63 combat support companies—either depot or ammunition units—as well as a second defense battalion, the 52nd. On average two to three new combat support companies were activated every month between April 1943 and October 1945. In total almost 20,000 African-Americans served in the Montford Point Marine units during World War II. Of these, 12,738 were deployed overseas in defense battalions or combat support companies or as stewards in the Mesanin Branch.

Montford Point Marines on the beach at Iwo Jima, March 1945.



50mm anti-aircraft crew of the 51st Defense Battalion practices loading shells at Montford Point, April 1945.



Men of the 12th Ammunition Company following the rapid Japanese retreat on Okinawa, west of the base of a Japanese war monument, April 1945.

Recruits Begin To Arrive
 The first African-American recruits arrived at Montford Point on August 26, 1942. Signing up African-American recruits for the Corps went slowly for the first six months. But beginning in January 1943, 1,000 African-Americans would enter the Marine Corps each month. All of these Marines would be trained at Montford Point.



Recruits are measured for uniforms, April 1943.



New African - American recruits at Montford Point, April 1943



Recruits receiving their first uniforms at Montford Point, 1942.

Action in the Pacific
 While combat operations by the 51st and 52nd Defense Battalions consisted primarily of a few months of patrol action against surviving Japanese on the captured island of Guam, the depot and ammunition companies saw savage fighting on the battlefields of Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Phehu, two Jims, and Okinawa. The fight for Okinawa, the last battle of World War II, involved some 2,000 African-American Marines, a larger concentration than for any previous operation. On Saipan, the African-American Leathernecks demonstrated they had earned the right to fight alongside their white fellow Marines. Their accomplishments so impressed the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Lieutenant General Alexander A. Vandegrift, that he declared:
"The Negro Marines are no longer on trial. They are Marines period."

A veteran 50mm crew of the 51st Defense Battalion poses with its gun, "Luna Horn", at Eniwetok in 1945.



African - American Marines move through the trenches on the beach at Peleliu Island during battle, September 15, 1945



Carrying a Japanese prisoner to be evacuated and transferred for repatriation, Iwo Jima, February 23, 1945



An infantry platoon of Montford Point Marines on a long hike, April 1945

Returning Home and Reduction in Strength
 Hostilities against Japan ended on 15 August 1945. On 31 January 1946, the first African-American combat unit organized by the Marine Corps for service in World War II officially disbanded at Montford Point. Recruiting for African-American Marines was suspended in the early months of 1946 until there was a clearer idea of how many veterans might become regulars and what the postwar troop requirements would be. By early 1947 the overall requirement for African-American personnel was only 1,500.

End of Montford Point as an African-American Training Center
 In the austere postwar period the number of African-American Marines was so relatively small that it became impractical to continue separate training facilities at Montford Point. On September 9, 1945, Headquarters Company, Montford Point Camp was deactivated and the remaining 242 officers and enlisted men were transferred, mostly to other Camp Lejeune units. The deactivation marked the beginning of the end of segregated Marine Corps units and it came just a little over seventy years after the first African-American recruits had reported for training. They had at least achieved a goal that many people, both inside and outside the Marine Corps, had worked for. While there were still segregated units in the Marine Corps, there were integrated units as well, and the trend continued towards a completely integrated Marine Corps.



Montford Point Marines in their dress uniforms which they considered to be the swaggiest uniform in the Armed Services, May 1943

African - American Units of the Fleet Marine Force, World War II

Unit Designation	Date of Service	Unit Designation	Date of Service	Unit Designation	Date of Service	Unit Designation	Date of Service	Unit Designation	Date of Service	Unit Designation	Date of Service
30th Marine Depot Co.	14 Aug 1943 - 11 Jan 1949	40th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949	50th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949	60th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949	70th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949	80th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949
90th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949	100th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949	110th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949	120th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949	130th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949	140th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949
150th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949	160th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949	170th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949	180th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949	190th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949	200th Marine Depot Co.	17 Oct 1943 - 27 Feb 1949

Note: In November 1945, the 200th Marine Depot Company was deactivated. The 201st Marine Depot Company was activated on 15 January 1946. The 202nd Marine Depot Company was activated on 15 January 1946. The 203rd Marine Depot Company was activated on 15 January 1946. The 204th Marine Depot Company was activated on 15 January 1946. The 205th Marine Depot Company was activated on 15 January 1946. The 206th Marine Depot Company was activated on 15 January 1946. The 207th Marine Depot Company was activated on 15 January 1946. The 208th Marine Depot Company was activated on 15 January 1946. The 209th Marine Depot Company was activated on 15 January 1946. The 210th Marine Depot Company was activated on 15 January 1946. The 211th Marine Depot Company was activated on 15 January 1946. The 212th Marine Depot Company was activated on 15 January 1946. The 213th Marine Depot Company was activated on 15 January 1946. The 214th Marine Depot Company was activated on 15 January 1946. 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