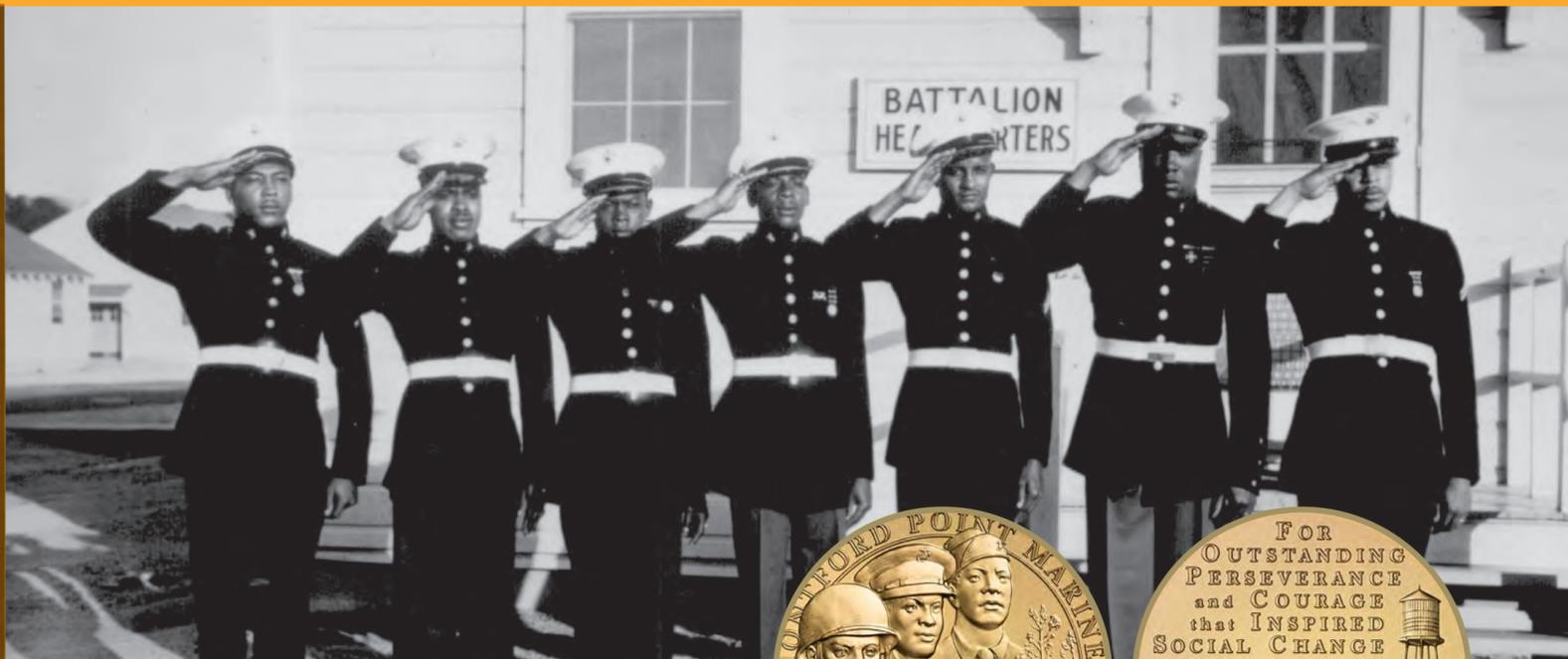


Defending Our Cultural Heritage



“And during that time that was a lot of saying about blacks going into the Marine Corps and it created some excitement. . . Finally the president issued the Executive Order...and in 1942 they started taking ‘em. And a friend of mine, ... he was the first one from there to go in. And when he came home on leave I just felt as though this were more or less the band of angels and I wanted to be with them.”

—MGy. Sgt. William Michael Woods, USMC (Ret.)



THE HISTORY OF THE CORPS... AS TOLD BY MARINES

Oral history provides us with a means of learning about and preserving an important perspective on the past, and helps document the relationships between events, the individuals that participated in those events, and the physical environment where those events occurred. The Marine Corps Oral History Program began during the Vietnam era, when historians conducted interviews of Active duty Marines after their combat tours. Today, the Program collects interviews and other types of oral histories covering all aspects of 20th century Marine Corps activities. The Program’s collection currently consists of approximately 13,000 histories. Marine Corps veterans and those who fought alongside them are invited to participate in this ongoing effort. For more information, go to: www.usmcmuseum.com/Museum/Oral History.asp.

“...on the twenty fourth day of July, 1946, I joined the United States Marine Corps, and I came here to Montford Point to be trained... The drill instructor was God, and his assistant was Jesus...the drilling itself made you aware of your entering...young manhood. I had that drumming in my head all day. If the next guy can take this training, then I can, too.”

—Sgt. Calvin Brown, USMC (Ret.)

“...we had, had Black DI's at that time there were still a few Whites around, but basically, the Black DI's were now taking over. We thought that would be good, but we found that that worse than having the White DI's, 'cause they, the Blacks were determined to make us succeed and to be real Marines... And that was their main goal, was to be sure that we were gonna be better than everybody else...”

—Cpl. Thomas E. Cork, USMC (Ret.)



MONTFORD POINT MARINES ORAL HISTORY

One prominent example of a Marine Corps oral history program is the Montford Point Marines oral history program. From 1942–1949, nearly 20,000 African-American men from across America came to Montford Point camp in Jacksonville, North Carolina seeking the American dream of inclusion and the opportunity to defend our country as a U.S. Marine. Like the wider society at large that was socially and culturally divided by race, the Marine Corps trained these men separately, limiting their place in the Corps and in its rich tradition of service. These men served in battle, provided critical supplies to those on the front lines and evacuated the wounded to safety. They did their jobs with professionalism and ably proved their courage in epic battles of the Pacific like Saipan, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. Because these men persevered, the Marine Corps underwent a social awakening that laid the foundation for greater equality and opportunity. Their story is one of triumph over adversity. Their legacy of courage and perseverance is an inspiration to all Marines. In recognition of their outstanding service, on 23 November 2011, President Obama signed into law a bill to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the Montford Point Marines. The Congressional Gold Medal is the nation’s highest civilian honor for distinguished achievement. The Medal ceremony is scheduled to occur in 2012.

To capture their brave and remarkable story, the Marine Corps Oral History Program and Montford Point Marine Association began collecting oral histories of the surviving members of the units that lived and trained at Montford Point. Histories are recorded in audio and video format, and transcribed for use by historians and family members. Because the stories are told by individual Marines, they enable listeners to hear what these Marines experienced in their own voices. For more information, or to read transcripts of interviews, go to: www.montfordpointmarines.com.

