

AFRICAN  
AMERICANS  
IN THE  
UNITED STATES  
MARINE CORPS



## **AFRICAN AMERICANS HAVE PROUDLY SERVED IN THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**

since World War II, when racial barriers prohibiting black enlistment were removed by Executive Order 8802. The struggles and hardships that black Marines faced over issues related to acceptance and integration were reflective of racial problems that plagued American society. Despite past adversity, the service and continued legacy of African American Marines exemplifies the Corps' motto: *Semper Fidelis*, or Always Faithful.

The National Museum of the Marine Corps opened with three historical galleries that highlight the Marine Corps' service during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Visitors also learn what it's like to become a Leatherneck in "Making Marines," a gallery that explores boot camp life and officer training. There are no separate



galleries dedicated to the many groups that comprise the Marine Corps. Instead, their stories are told within the context of history.

This brochure serves as a *special topic guide* for visitors who wish to learn more about the contributions of African Americans to the Marine Corps. The Scuttlebutt Theater provides an informative orientation film, with testimonies from two noteworthy African American Marines, Sergeant Major Lee M. Bradley and Major James Capers. It's a good place to begin your tour of the Museum.



## Uncommon Valor: Marines in World War II

AT THE OUTBREAK OF WORLD WAR II, AFRICAN AMERICANS

**1** petitioned the U.S. President to open racially restricted occupations and specialties of the armed forces.

In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, under pressure from prominent civil rights leaders and community organizations, directed the Marine Corps to allow the enlistment of African Americans. In response to the President's request and in accordance with existing racial segregation policies throughout the armed forces, the Marine Corps established a separate training facility for black recruits on Montford Point at New River, North Carolina, the site of present day Camp Lejeune.

The first black recruits reported to Montford Point on 26 August 1942. They were the vanguard for approximately 19,000 African Americans who served in the Marine Corps during World War II.

Please visit the World War II gallery to learn more about the first black Marines and their experiences, from Montford Point to battles in the Pacific theater. An exhibit entitled "Montford Point" details recruitment, training, and types of units structured around a segregated Corps. If using the audio tour, stop #13 relays more details on Montford Point Marines. As many of these black units saw service on islands and in campaigns across the Pacific, such as Saipan, Guam, Peleliu, and Iwo Jima, look for images of African American Marines featured throughout the gallery.

## Send in the Marines: The Korean War



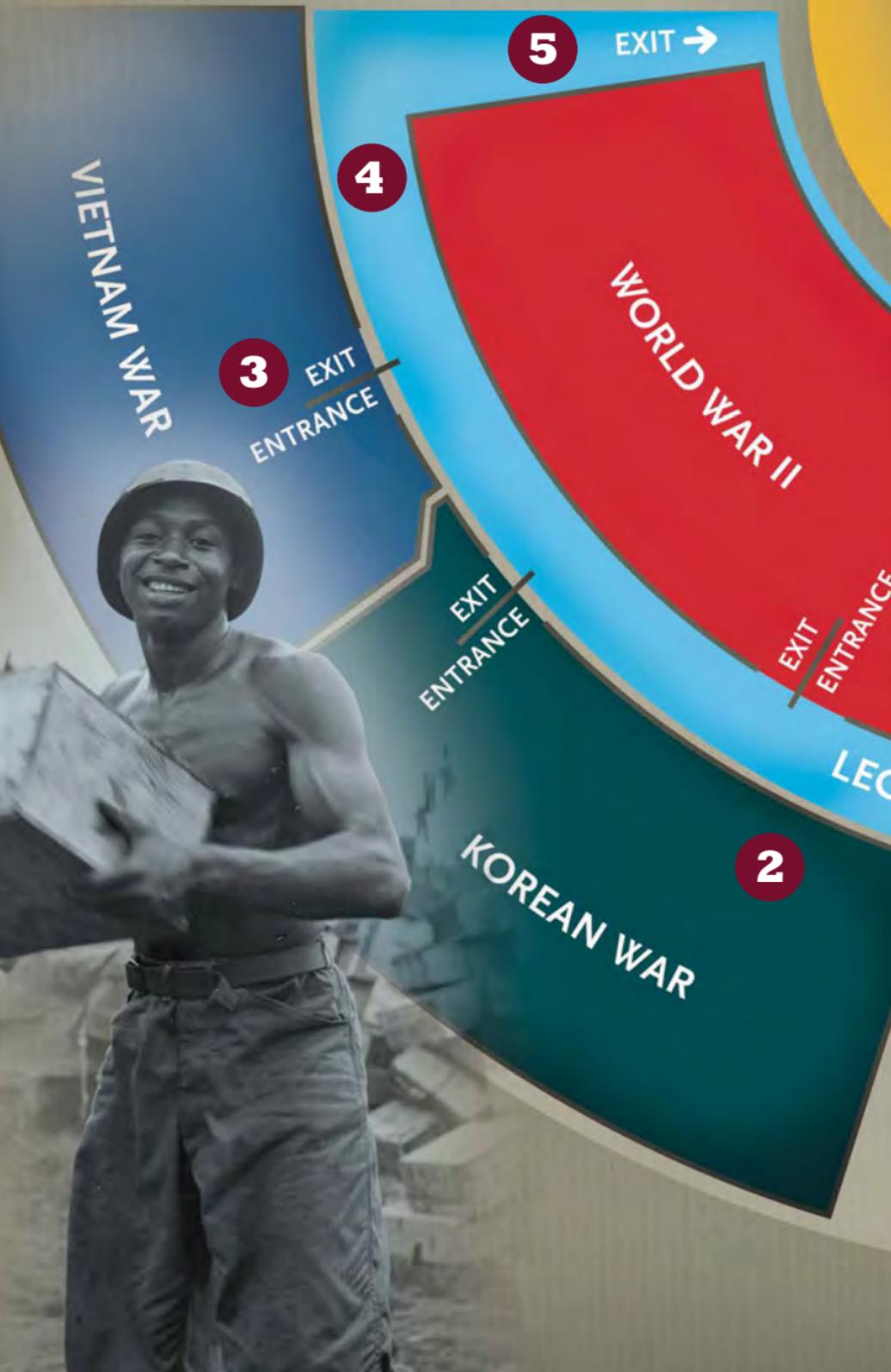
THE RISE OF THE U.S. AND THE UNION OF

**2** Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) as the two dominant powers at the end of World War II brought about tensions with global repercussions—the Cold War. Anxiety over the possibility of armed conflict involving the United States and a Soviet bloc nation prompted African Americans to insist on the desegregation of the armed forces and equal opportunities for black service personnel in the looming conflict.

In response, President Harry Truman, on 26 July 1948, issued Executive Order 9981, desegregating the armed forces. A month prior to the issuance of the order, Congress also passed the Women's Armed Services Act, giving women a formal role to play in the Marine Corps. These two directives paved the way for Annie E. Graham to enlist as the first black woman Marine on 8 September 1949.

The outbreak of hostilities in Korea provided the first test for the newly integrated Marine Corps. Indeed, the adjustments proved advantageous for both the black Marines and the Corps. The Korean War brought about some “black firsts,” such as the first black Marine fighter pilot, as well as dispelling doubts about the combat capabilities of black Marines and integrated units.

More details regarding the desegregation of the Marine Corps and black service in the Korean War are provided in the Korean War gallery in an exhibit titled “A Fully Integrated Corps.”



## In the Land, Air, and Sea: The War in Vietnam



THE VIETNAM WAR, AMERICA'S longest armed conflict, erupted amid a period of immense social and political turmoil in the United States. America's armed forces entered the conflict fully integrated; however, all participants faced the challenges wrought by a changing political and cultural landscape. The modern Civil Rights struggle and the rise of the "black power" movement in

the mid-1960s greatly influenced young people, including young black Marine Corps recruits. Indeed, the cultural and political changes that found expression in America's urban centers and on many college campuses also found their way into the Marine Corps. Tensions erupted into violent confrontations on naval and military installations as young African American service personnel actively confronted racial slights and aggressively promoted a cultural identity rooted in the struggle for freedom and equality.





During this period, the Marine Corps sought to ease tensions by increasing the number of black officers, allowing certain cultural expressions, such as the afro hair style, and establishing programs to alleviate tensions and foster better racial harmony.

Despite the racial tensions of the Vietnam era, African American Marines continued to serve with pride. Racial conflicts that did plague the Corps generally erupted on bases in the U.S. or in rear echelon and rest areas. On the front lines, Marines focused on the mission at hand and found unity in combat.

The Vietnam War gallery provides a glimpse into the trials that African Americans faced in combat. An oral testimony by retired Lieutenant General Frank Petersen details aerial combat over Vietnam and can be found in the Quang Nam exhibit.

## Medal of Honor Wall

FIVE AFRICAN AMERICAN MARINES HAVE BEEN AWARDED THE

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Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for bravery for "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty." Medal of Honor recipients are honored near the end of "Legacy Walk" on the Medal of Honor Wall.

## The Modern Marine

AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AND WOMEN

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continue to serve the Marine Corps with distinction during times of peace and war. See images from today's Global War on Terrorism taken by Marine Corps combat photographers. The National Museum of the Marine Corps is a constant work in progress. As new exhibits and artifacts are added to its galleries, so, too, will new images and information about this special topic.



#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

To explore the topic of African American contributions to the Marine Corps further, please consider the following:

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Astor, Gerald. *The Right to Fight: A History of African Americans in the Military*, Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1998.

Davis, Alphonse. *Pride, Progress, and Prospects: The Marine Corps' Efforts to Increase the Presence of African-American Officers (1970–1995)*, Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 2000.

Edgerton, Robert. *Hidden Heroism: Black Soldiers in America's Wars*, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001.

McLaurin, Melton. *The Marines of Montford Point: America's First Black Marines*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Nalty, Bernard. *The Right to Fight: African American Marines in World War II*, Washington, D.C.: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1995

Petersen, Frank E. with Phelps, J. Alfred. *Into the Tiger's Jaw: America's First Black Marine Aviator, The Autobiography of Lt. Gen. Frank E. Petersen*, California: Presidio Press, 1998.

Shaw, Jr., Henry I. and Ralph Donnelly. *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 2002.

Terry, Wallace. *Bloods, an Oral History of the Vietnam War*, New York: Random House, 1984.

#### **INTERNET LINKS OF INTEREST**

Montford Point Marine Association, Inc.

<http://www.montfordpointmarines.com>

<http://tinyurl.com/7h2vxf>

Montford Point Collection at the Randall Library,

The University of North Carolina:

<http://tinyurl.com/98b7fm>

Right To Fight: African American Marines in World War II:

<http://tinyurl.com/9yncsv>

#### **MUSEUMS OF INTEREST**

U. S. Navy Museum, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, DC

Montford Point Marines National Museum,

Camp Johnson, Jacksonville, NC

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