

African Americans in the United States Marine Corps Timeline

1776 April - The first African American to fight in a Marine role was John Martin, also known as Keto, the slave of a Delaware man, recruited in April 1776 without his owner's, William Marshall of Wilmington, Delaware, permission by Captain of the Marines Miles Pennington of the Continental brig USS Reprisal. Private Martin participated in a cruise that resulted in the capture of five British merchantmen, but died in October 1777, along with all but one of his shipmates, when Reprisal foundered in a gale.

1776 December - Two African Americans, Isaac Walker and a man known only as Orange, enlisted at Philadelphia's Tun Tavern in a company raised by Robert Mullan, the owner of the Tavern, which served as a recruiting rendezvous for Marines. Captain Mullan's company, part of a battalion raised by Major Samuel Nicholas, crossed the Delaware River with George Washington on Christmas Eve 1776 and fought the British at Princeton in January 1777.

1776-1783 - During the American Revolution, there were 2,000 Continental Marines and at least thirteen being African Americans. This military opportunity would be short-lived.

1792 May 2 - "Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, That each and every free able-bodied white male citizen of the respective States, resident therein, who is or shall be of age of eighteen years, and under the age of forty-five years (except as is herein after excepted) shall severally and respectively be enrolled in the militia." ~ The Militia Act of 1792, Second Congress, Session I. Chapter XXVIII

1796 - "No Negro, Mulatto, or Indian is to be recruited [in the Marine Corps]." ~ James McHenry, Secretary of War, 1796. This act remained law until the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 allowed Negroes to serve in the army and navy, but not the Marines. For 167 years, this policy remained in effect.

1941 June 20 – 25 - Over 100,000 African Americans planned to march in Washington D.C. and President Roosevelt fearing riots, along with the message it would send to Axis leaders, and needing African American support for the war effort signed Executive Order 8802 on June 25th, 1941. "I do hereby reaffirm the policy of the United States that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin..." Walter White, President of the NAACP stated, " There has never been issued in American and Executive Order more affecting Negroes in this country since the Emancipation Proclamation by Abraham Lincoln." ~ Executive Order 8802, June 25th, 1941

1942 August 26 - The first African American recruits arrived at Montford Point in Jacksonville, North Carolina. They were met by an unwilling Marine Corps with white officers chosen for their history with African Americans. The reaction to African American Marines was often bitter, "I came to here to undertake the impossible assignment of making Marines out of you goddamn people. When the first load of y'all got here it made want to puke, then go get drunk! The material gets worse with each platoon. The Marine Corps is not for cooks and janitors, which is about all you...are qualified to do." ~ Drill Instructor Sergeant Germany, 1942. "Even though we were all Marines we were kept separate. We didn't have barracks, we lived in huts, built from cardboard, painted green. Camp Lejeune had barracks but we had huts. It was located in the back woods, amid water snakes and bears." ~ Montford Point Marine Sergeant Carrel Reavis, February 3, 2014

1943 March 14 – Eight Montford Point Marines were promoted to drill sergeant, and the first time that American military included Montford Point Marines in a newsreel. However, General Thomas Holcomb, Commandant of the Marine Corps issued Letter of Instruction 421 which limited the Negroes rights and responsibilities entrusted to them by the Marine Corps stating the in no case will there be an African American NCO senior to White men in the same unit.

1943 April - Once the men left Montford Point, they were shipped overseas to the Pacific, but not a single one was put into a combat unit. Instead, they were put in the 51st and 52nd Defense Battalions or support companies, whose purpose was to stay out of direct combat.

1943-1945 - The only Montford Marines to see action, and record casualties, were the Ammunition and Depot Companies in Saipan, Guam, and Peleliu. Private Kenneth Tibbs was the first black Marine to lose his life on June 15, 1944. The Montford Pointers took full responsibility and performed at the highest combat level eradicating racial myths. Out of the 20,000 trained at Montford Point, 87 were killed in action. At war's end, all but 1,500 were discharged by the government.

1945 November 10 - First African American officer commissioned 2nd Lieutenant was Frederick C. Branch.

1948 July 26 - President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981 establishing equality of treatment and opportunity in the U.S. military regardless of race.

1949 September 8 - First African American female Marine was Annie E. Graham.

1950 January 1 - First African American aviator was Frank E. Petersen.

1967 February 28 – James Anderson Jr. becomes the first African American Medal of Honor recipient in the Marine Corps by sacrificing his life by smothering a grenade with his body in Cam Lo.

1967 September 6 - Rodney M. Davis becomes the second African American Medal of Honor recipient in the Marine Corps by sacrificing his life by smothering a grenade with his body in Quang Nam Province.

1968 March 5 - Ralph H. Johnson becomes the third African American Medal of Honor recipient in the Marine Corps by sacrificing his life by smothering a grenade with his body on Hill 146 in Quan Duc Valley.

1969 February 23 - Oscar P. Austin becomes the fourth African American Medal of Honor recipient in the Marine Corps by sacrificing his life to save a wounded Marine at Da Nang.

1969 March 5 - Robert H. Jenkins, Jr. becomes the fifth African American Medal of Honor recipient in the Marine Corps by sacrificing his life to shield a wounded Marine from an exploding grenade in Fire Support Base Argonne, DMZ.

1974 April 19 - Montford Point renamed Camp Gilbert H. Johnson.

1979 February 23 - First African American Marine Corps General is Frank E. Petersen.

1999 July 1 - First African American Marine Corps Sergeant Major is Alford L. McMichael.

2001 July 1 - First African American Female Pilot is Vernice Armour

2003 March – Vernice Armour flew with HMLA-169 during the invasion of Iraq becoming America's first African-American female combat pilot.

2011 August 1 - Montford Pointers's History added to USMC curriculum.

2012 June 27 - Montford Point Marines Receive Congressional Gold Medal.

2013 March 2 - First mobile landing platform named after Montford Point Marines.



Photography Collections of African Americans in the Marine Corps

African American Marine photos from USMC archives

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/usmcarchives/sets/72157648071164833/>

Montford Point Marine photos from USMC archives

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/usmcarchives/sets/72157627398756047/>

African American Marine photos from the USMC history division

<https://www.mcu.usmc.mil/historydivision/AfricanAmerican%20Marines/Forms/AllItems.aspx#>

Electronic Publications

The Right to Fight: African-American Marines in World War II

http://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/Publications/The%20Right%20to%20Fight%20African-American%20Marines%20in%20World%20War%20II%20PCN%2019000313200_1.pdf

Blacks in the Marine Corps, part 1

http://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/Publications/Blacks%20in%20the%20Marine%20Corps%20PCN%201900030620_0_1.pdf

Blacks in the Marine Corps, part 2

http://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/Publications/Blacks%20in%20the%20Marine%20Corps%20PCN%201900030620_0_2.pdf

Blacks in the Marine Corps, part 3

http://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/Publications/Blacks%20in%20the%20Marine%20Corps%20PCN%201900030620_0_3.pdf

Blacks in the Marine Corps, part 4

http://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/Publications/Blacks%20in%20the%20Marine%20Corps%20PCN%201900030620_0_4.pdf

Montford Point Marines interactive timeline

<https://www.timetoast.com/timelines/montford-point-marines-1942-1949>

Additional Resources about African Americans in the Marine Corps

Montford Point Marines Association

<http://www.montfordpointmarines.com/>

Joshua Abreu History Day website on Montford Point Marines

<http://93606988.weebly.com/>

History Day You Tube about Montford Point Marines

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMSc0yOrpk>

USMC tribute to the Montford Point Marines

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khl-eQtK9Dw>

Montford Point poster

<http://www.lejeune.marines.mil/Portals/27/Documents/EMD/Cultural-Resources/PublicOutreach/Montford%20Point%20Display1.pdf>