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UNITED STATES ARMY WARRANT OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

**REPRESENTING
WARRANT OFFICERS
& THEIR FAMILIES
SINCE 1972**

Black History Month

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By CW4 (Ret) Farrell J. Chiles

CW4 (Ret) Chiles recognizes the first black Warrant Officers to serve in our sister Service, the USMC.

The Montford Point Marines and the Warrant Officer Connection

The Montford Point Marines were the first African Americans to serve in the United States Marine Corps.

In 1941, by Executive Order 8802 issued by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the armed forces were forced to accept African American into their services.

From 1942 to 1949, an estimated 19,000 African Americans trained at the segregated Montford Point Camp, adjacent to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, where whites were assigned. After their initial boot training, the Montford Point Marines were assigned to segregated battalions and units.

The Montford Point Marines of the 8th Ammunition Company and the 36th Depot Company landed on the island of Iwo Jima on D-Day, February 19, 1945. The largest number of African American Marines to serve in combat during World War II took part in the seizure of Okinawa in the Ryuku Islands with some 2,000 seeking action during the campaign.

In spite of the racism, segregation, and discrimination suffered by the Montford Point Marines, they served our country and performed at the highest standards of the military. Their record was exemplary.

On October 25, 2011, the United States House of Representatives passed unanimously a bill to honor the Montford Point Marines with a Congressional Gold Medal. A similar bill was passed in the U.S. Senate on November 10, 2011, the 236th Anniversary of the birth of

the United States Marine Corps. President Obama signed the bills into law on November 23, 2011. The next step is the presentation of the Congressional Gold Medal to surviving members at a ceremony at the Capital Rotunda scheduled for the spring in 2012.

The Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable Ray Mabus, on January 4, 2012, announced that one of the Navy's first three Mobile Landing Platform ships will be named the USNS Montford Point. The ship is expected for delivery in fiscal year 2013 and will become operational in fiscal year 2015.

The Marines were the last service to appoint African Americans to the rank of warrant officer. The first warrant officer was not appointed until 1959.

Let me share the story of three African American Marine warrant officers:

The Honorable James E. Johnson

James E. Johnson was born in Madison, Illinois, on March 3, 1926.

During World War II, he entered the United States Marine Corps as an enlisted man and rose through the ranks to the grade of Chief Warrant Officer. In 1959, he was the first African American to be appointed a warrant officer in the United States Marine Corps. He retired from military service in 1965 and became an executive with the Prudential Life Insurance Company. In 1967 he was appointed Director, California State Department of Veterans Affairs.





In 1969 he became Vice Chairman, U.S. Civil Service Commission, one of three members who govern the affairs of 3 million civil service employees. He served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs from June 16, 1971 until August 2, 1973.

Mr. Johnson attended Orange University, received an Associates of Arts Degree from Santa Ana College and his Bachelor of Arts Degree from George Washington University, where he majored in Business Administration. He is married to the former Juanita Butler and they have four children – Kenneth, Verne, Kurtis, and Juan.

Chief Warrant Officer Annie L. Grimes, USMC (Retired)

Annie Laurie Grimes was born in Arlington, Tennessee, to Mr. and Mrs. Horace Karr Grimes. She graduated from high school in Somerville, Tennessee in 1946 and attended Ray Vogue Trade School in Chicago, Illinois in 1949. On February 2, 1950, she became the third African American woman to enlist in the Marine Corps. Unlike African American males, who received recruit training at the segregated Montford Point Camp in North Carolina, black women were integrated with other women recruits at Parris Island, South Carolina. Upon completion of recruit training the following May, Annie was promoted to Private First Class.

In January 1965, Gunnery Sergeant Grimes was transferred to Marine Base, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina and served as Procurement Chief until June 1967. During this tour, she was promoted to Master Sergeant. On August 1, 1966, Grimes was appointed a warrant officer, the first African American woman in the United States Marine Corps to earn the distinction.

Warrant Officer Grimes was then ordered to the Marine Corps Supply Center, Barstow, California, where she was assigned to the Material Division. While at Barstow, she completed the sub courses required for Temporary Officer Training and was promoted to Chief Warrant Officer. This tour of duty ended in December 1969.

In January 1970, Chief Warrant Officer Grimes was transferred to Fleet Marine Base, Pacific, Camp Smith Hawaii and was assigned duty with the Assistance Chief of Staff, G-4, where she remained until retirement on October 1, 1970.

During her career, Chief Warrant Officer Grimes was awarded the Good Conduct Medal with two bronze stars and the National Defense Service Medal with one bronze star. In 1965, she was awarded a Meritorious Mast by the Commanding General, Marine Corps Supply Activity, Philadelphia, PA.

Chief Warrant Officer Grimes became a life member of the Women Marine Association (WMA) and the Montford Point Marine Association (MPMA). She currently resides in Arlington, Tennessee.

Chief Warrant Officer Four James T. Averhart, Jr.

Mr. James Averhart, PhD. currently serves as the president of the Montford Point Marines Association.

Chief Warrant Officer Four Averhart was born on March 14, 1968 and is a native of Mobile, Alabama. He enlisted in the Marine Corps delayed entry program in January 1987 and shipped to recruit training in August 1987 at Parris Island, SC.

On January 19, 2007 Chief Warrant Officer Four Averhart assumed the duties as the Commanding Officer of Marine Corps Base Brig, and Company Commander, Brig Company Headquarters and Support Battalion, Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune, NC. CWO4 James Averhart is currently the commander of the Regional Joint Confinement Facility in Chesapeake, Virginia. The Regional Joint Confinement Facility is a level two, medium security brig with a 400 person capacity. Averhart, who received orders in June 2010, has the responsibility as commander of the Marine Detachment and security department head of the brig.

He was promoted to his current rank of chief warrant officer four on June 1, 2007.

Chief Warrant Officer Four Averhart's personal decorations include the Navy Commendation Medal (gold star in lieu of second award), Navy Achievement Medal, (gold star in lieu of third award), Combat Action Ribbon, Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal (with three bronze stars), and the Marine Corps Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal (gold star in lieu of second award). He has completed a successful tour as a Drill Instructor, and Airborne School.

James Averhart is a Lifetime Member and an active member of the Montford Point Marines Association for 12 years. He is the only active duty Marine currently holding a National Officers billet.

Averhart is an active member in his church, community and several other organizations. He served as the Assistant Chair of the Legal Re-dress committee with the Onslow County Branch, NAACP.

Mr. Averhart has continued to pursue his educational goals while on active duty by receiving an Associate of Arts in General Studies, Associate of Arts in Theology, Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice, a Bachelor of Science in Theology and Biblical Studies, a Masters Degree in Security Management, and a Doctorate degree in Divinity and Theology.

The Montford Point Marine Association (MPMA)

The Montford Point Marine Association is a charitable non-profit 501 (c) (3) veteran organization established to perpetuate the legacy of the first African Americans who entered the United States Marine Corps from 1942 to 1949 at Montford Point, New River, North Carolina. The purpose of the Association is to support educational assistance, veterans programs, and promotion of community services. The Association works to improve the social conditions of our veterans, local families, youth and the growing population of senior citizens.

CWO4 James Averhart currently serves as the president of the Montford Point Marine Association. He is dedicated to preserving the legacy of the Montford Point Marines and wants to ensure that the courage of his predecessors does not go unnoticed.

"If they had not done what they did, I would not be able to do what I do," Averhart said. "That's why I have an obligation." ■■■