

JIM CROW AMERICA AND THE MARINES OF MONTFORD POINT  
IN THE WORLD WAR II ERA

A Thesis

by

CAMERON DEMETRIUS MCCOY

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2011

Major Subject: History

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Joseph G. Dawson, III
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## ABSTRACT

Jim Crow America and the Marines of Montford Point in the World War II Era.

(December 2011)

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The Marines of Montford Point are largely absent from the World War II narrative, and relatively unknown to individuals in the military services and to the public at large. After 144 years of official policy against allowing blacks to serve their country as U.S. Marines, on June 1, 1942, the nation's first black Marines broke the color barrier, gaining entry into a military organization that today carries with it tremendous symbolic and mythic significance in America. Moreover, serving in harm's way to defend a prejudiced nation, black Marines demonstrated bravery and endurance in the face of institutionalized racism.

This thesis examines the southern Jim Crow experiences of selected northern African American Marines, focusing on the ways in which these men responded to the discrimination they encountered in the South. It also explores the reasons why these men joined the most racist branch of the military and what knowledge they had of Executive Order 8802 and the Navy Department's May 20, 1942, press release, announcing the Marine Corps's plans for recruiting blacks.

Furthermore, it examines the various ways in which all African American Marines coped with Jim Crow laws, and explores the realities that black and white American society created about black Marines and their wartime service. It also discusses how northern and southern black Marines engaged and interacted within a strict segregationist military organization, particularly in how the Marine Corps manipulated the Selective Service in order to protect what senior officers considered to be its elitist image.

The comparison to the U.S. Army's framework of task organization and combat employment of black soldiers reveals that the Army made greater strides toward racial justice and equality by allowing blacks to serve as commissioned officers, albeit in segregated units; whereas the Marine Corps instituted no comparable reform. After the war began, the Marines could have commissioned African Americans by following the models of all-black units such as the 93rd Infantry Division and the Tuskegee Airmen. In sum, initial racial opinions shifted differently in each military service during the war; and for black Marines, it officially marked a new tradition of military service.

## DEDICATION

To the few and the proud who, accepting incredible risk, broke the color barrier.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Joseph G. Dawson III and my committee members, Dr. James C. Bradford, Dr. Albert S. Broussard, and Dr. James S. Burk, for their guidance and support throughout the course of this research. In addition to the guidance and counsel of my committee chair and committee members, I would also like to thank Dr. Sylvia D. Hoffert for her patience and encouragement during this process.

Thanks also go to my friends and colleagues as well as the department faculty and staff for making my time at Texas A&M University a great experience. I also want to extend my appreciation and gratitude to Finney Greggs, director of the Montford Point Marines Museum at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and his wife, Louise; the Pat Tillman Foundation and the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation, which both provided financial support in completing this study.

Finally, special thanks to my first critical reader, Jennifer, for reading through hundreds of pages of text without complaint and tremendous patience. *Semper Fidelis.*

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## CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: WHERE ARE THE U.S. MARINE CORPS'S AFRICAN  
AMERICAN WORLD WAR II HEROES AND ICONS?

After President Abraham Lincoln had confirmed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, and authorized the recruitment of African American soldiers into the federal forces, abolitionist Frederick Douglass gave a speech at Philadelphia's National Hall in which he posed a vital question: "Should the Negro Enlist in the Union Army?" By posing this question, Douglass demonstrated that African Americans realized the importance of military service as it related to equality, social advancement, and the rights of citizenship. Moreover, African Americans understood the opportunities that came with military service, as did white Americans; they too were aware of the future implications of social equality if blacks donned the Union blue.<sup>1</sup>

Seven decades later, Douglass's question had lost none of its significance as the United States Marine Corps continued, as it had for 144 years, to oppose admitting blacks into its ranks. As African Americans hoped to enter the U.S. Marine Corps, to serve as equals, not in segregated units, and to press their claims for full citizenship, these contested issues reached new salience during World War II and the postwar era,

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This thesis follows the style of the *Journal of Military History*.

<sup>1</sup> John W. Blassingame, ed., *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews* 3: 1855–1863 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 596; see also Neil A. Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2010), 1. "African Americans," "Blacks," "Colored," "Negroes" and variants will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

setting the stage, in the words of historian Richard M. Dalfume, for the civil rights movement.<sup>2</sup>

African American men who entered the Marines from 1942 to 1949 became known as Montford Point Marines. For these men, simply serving in the Marine Corps's uniform in the 1940s was a drastic departure from previous U.S. military practices. This thesis examines the process, policies, and practices concerning the status of African American men and emphasizes the significance of what it meant to be a black U.S. Marine during World War II. One central problem for African Americans who enlisted in the Marine Corps during World War II, and trained in the South, was how to abide by southern social expectations and laws that differed fundamentally from the *unofficial* rules of integration governing interracial relations in the North.<sup>3</sup> These fundamental social differences, as well as notions of equality and rights to citizenship, separated northern and southern black Marine recruits, despite the fact that white southerners viewed them all the same. This thesis will explore why these men joined the most racist

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<sup>2</sup> Richard M. Dalfume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts, 1939–1953* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 1–5, 132–147.

<sup>3</sup> During the 1940s the “rules of integration” were the established state and local Jim Crow laws in the United States, enacted between 1876 and 1965. These laws mandated racial segregation in all public facilities, with an ostensible “separate but equal” status for blacks, and constituted the most elaborate and formal expression of sovereign white opinion upon the subject. In reality, this led to treatment and accommodations that were typically inferior to those provided for whites, systematizing a number of economic, educational and social disadvantages. See C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, original publication, 1955; commemorative edition, 2002), 7. The term “enlisted/enlistees” in this thesis includes all men who were drafted and enrolled in the Marine Corps; additionally, “Marines,” “USMC,” “Corps” and variants will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

branch of the military, what knowledge they had of Executive Order 8802 and the Navy Department's May 20, 1942, press release, announcing the Marine Corps's plans for recruiting blacks, as well as how they confronted southern Jim Crow laws within the Marine Corps and the white society of the South. It will conclude that African American Marine recruits neither understood the full ramifications of their decision to join the Corps during World War II nor the difficulties they would inevitably encounter in the South—the nation's most impoverished region during the 1940s. In North Carolina, black Marines were forced to abide by nefarious segregationist state laws and to endure the racial prejudice of a white society devoted to Jim Crow America—the doctrine of white supremacy.

This thesis contends that the accommodation skills and the predictable ways in which black Marine recruits behaved toward and responded to racism was a byproduct of their domestic environment and geographical framework of racial engagement. As these black Marine recruits transitioned to a new way of life south of the Mason-Dixon Line, they either accepted or challenged the southern system of Jim Crow. While several northern and southern black Marine recruits passively accepted southern racism, others responded aggressively and opposed the rules of segregation and legal discrimination in the American South.

In the 1940s, the names of first generation black U.S. Marines such as Howard Perry, Gilbert "Hashmark" Johnson, Edgar Huff, and Frederick Clinton Branch were not popularly associated with military achievement or combat heroism. Yet, these four U.S. Marines are "firsts" according to Marine Corps history. During World War II, these

African American Marines engaged with bigoted enemies other than the Axis powers (Nazi Germans, Fascist Italians, and Imperial Japanese): *segregation* and *racial discrimination* presented these men with a seemingly insurmountable two-front war in their own country. Perry, Johnson, Huff, and Branch (who all enlisted) are part of what journalist Tom Brokaw called America's *Greatest Generation*; even so, very few Marines, and fewer Americans, know of their wartime service or legacies.<sup>4</sup>

Howard Perry was the first African American to *officially* enlist in the Marine Corps.<sup>5</sup> Edgar Huff was the first African American Marine to achieve the rank of Sergeant Major,<sup>6</sup> Gilbert Johnson is the only African American Marine to have a military installation named in his honor,<sup>7</sup> and Frederick Branch was the first black commissioned officer of the U.S. Marine Corps.<sup>8</sup> These men are heroes and icons to

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<sup>4</sup> Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Reserve Officers of Public Affairs Unit 4-1, *The Marine Corps Reserve: A History* (Washington, D.C.: Division of Reserve, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1966), 74; Henry I. Shaw, Jr. and Ralph W. Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1975), 2-3; Neal Thompson, "Montford Point Marines," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 131 (November 2005): 32.

<sup>6</sup> In January 1943, Huff became the Marine Corps's first African American non-commissioned officer. See Shaw and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 10-13; Bernard C. Nalty, *The Right to Fight: African-American Marines in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1994), 4-5, 8-9.

<sup>7</sup> In February 1943, Johnson became the Marine Corps's first African American Drill Instructor; Camp Gilbert H. Johnson is a satellite camp of Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune and home to the Marine Corps Combat Service Support Schools (MCCSSS)—located on what is formerly known as *Montford Point*, the site of recruit training for the first African Americans to serve in the Marine Corps. See Shaw and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 10-13; Nalty, *Right to Fight*, 4-5, 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> Branch was commissioned on November 10, 1945. See Judson L. Jeffries, "The Marine Corps' First Black Commissioned Officer: The Life and Legacy of Frederick C. Branch," *North*

some, but still unknown to the public at large.<sup>9</sup> Their significance during World War II is overshadowed by the military organization in which they chose to serve, and by the limitations and strictures placed on them by American society during their era. Until approximately 1965, a notable characteristic of the study of American history has been the lack of attention given to the experiences of neglected groups. The study of African Americans in the U.S. Marine Corps during World War II is one of these experiences that have not been widely recognized.

U.S. Marines Samuel Nicholas,<sup>10</sup> Presley O'Bannon,<sup>11</sup> Archibald Henderson,<sup>12</sup> Smedley Butler and Daniel Daly (the only two Marines to be twice awarded the

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*Carolina Historical Review* 87 (October 2010): 379–402; Matt Schudel, “Frederick C. Branch; Was 1st Black Officer in the U.S. Marine Corps,” *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), April 13, 2005, B06; Reserve Officers of Public Affairs Unit 4–1, *The Marine Corps Reserve*, 75.

<sup>9</sup> After the late eighteenth century, several U.S. Marine units consisted of a strange mixture of seamen, landsmen, regular army troops, militiamen, and Marines. Due to faulty record keeping, these contingents were seldom, if ever, recognized as “official” Marine Corps units, making it difficult to rule out if African Americans served as “U.S. Marines” according to muster rolls. See Gerard T. Altoff, “War of 1812: Leathernecks On Lake Erie,” *Leatherneck* 71 (November 1988): 38–39, 42–43.

<sup>10</sup> Major Samuel Nicholas, first Commandant of the Marine Corps, served in the Corps from 1775–1783. See Charles R. Smith, *Marines in the Revolution: A History of the Continental Marines in the American Revolution, 1775–1783* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1975), 12–14; James C. Bradford, “Samuel Nicholas,” in *Commandants of the Marine Corps*, Allan R. Millett and Jack Shulimson, eds. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 17–26; Marc Cerasini, *Heroes: U.S. Marine Corps Medal of Honor Winners* (New York: Berkley Books, 2002), 4–7.

<sup>11</sup> O'Bannon's years of service in the Corps were 1801–1807. His heroic service on the “the shores of Tripoli” is commemorated in the Mameluke sword worn by U.S. Marine Corps officers, a sword patterned after the famed blade of Damascus presented to O'Bannon by Hamet Karamanli (1804, rightful heir to the throne of Tripoli) in appreciation for services rendered on “the shores of Tripoli.” See Cerasini, *Heroes*, 17–20, 25; Millett and Shulimson, eds.,

Congressional Medal of Honor), Lewis “Chesty” Puller (the only Marine awarded the Navy Cross five times),<sup>13</sup> and John Basilone<sup>14</sup> are synonymous with military achievement and heroism in Marine Corps lore. Their reputations and legacies are defined by the battles in which they participated, their positions of command and leadership, and by their military decorations. There is not a single member of the U.S. Marine Corps who *does not* know of these men and their wartime achievements and contributions. Tun Tavern (birthplace of the Continental Marines), the Mameluke

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*Commandants of the Marine Corps*, 65; Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marines Corps* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 44–45.

<sup>12</sup> Henderson’s years of service in the Corps were 1806–1859. On 17 October 1820, at the age of 37, Lieutenant Colonel Henderson was appointed as the Commandant of the Marine Corps. He served in this position for a little over 38 years—the longest of any officer to hold that position. He is also known as the “Grand old man of the Marine Corps.” See Joseph H. Alexander, “Archibald Henderson” in Millett and Shulimson, eds., *Commandants of the Marine Corps*, 54–73; Joseph G. Dawson III, “With Fidelity and Effectiveness: Archibald Henderson’s Lasting Legacy to the U.S. Marine Corps,” *Journal of Military History* 62 (October 1998): 727–753; Cerasini, *Heroes*, 27–31, 43.

<sup>13</sup> George Forty, *US Marine Corps Handbook, 1941–1945* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2006), 252, 258; James E. Wise and Scott Baron, *The Navy Cross: Extraordinary Heroism in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Conflicts* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 128–150, 232–235.

<sup>14</sup> Basilone’s years of service in the Corps were from 1940–1945. Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone was awarded the Medal of Honor in recognition of his outstanding heroism at Guadalcanal. Later, during the Iwo Jima campaign, he was killed in action on D-Day, February 19, 1945. At Iwo Jima, Basilone again distinguished himself, single-handedly destroying a Japanese blockhouse while braving a heavy bombardment of enemy fire. For his exploits he was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross. See James Brady, *Hero of the Pacific: The Life of Marine Legend John Basilone* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 2, 8–9, 18–20, 24–28, 29–36, 41–45, 46–55, 57, 69, 71–72, 132–133, 152, 180, 181–191, 194–197, 198–205, 206–216, 221, 230–233.

Sword,<sup>15</sup> the Blood stripe,<sup>16</sup> the Marines' Hymn, and the campaigns of Guadalcanal, Peleliu, and Iwo Jima are not only symbolic in the distinguished record of the Marine Corps, but are related to each of these white Marine icons. When enlisted Marine recruits and officer candidates enter the Corps, their first lessons in Marine Corps history are spearheaded with tales of these legendary giants. The Marine Corps is steeped in tradition and this serves as the foundation of the organization's ethos, which defines all its members.

During the fall of 1776, eighty-seven years prior to the Emancipation Proclamation, Isaac Walker and a man known only as "Orange" were identified on the rolls of the Continental Marines as "Negroes." Both formally enlisted at Philadelphia's Tun Tavern in Captain Robert Mullan's company of Continental Marines on April 1, 1777. Mullan's company crossed the Delaware River with George Washington during the winter of 1776–1777 and fought against the British in the Second Battle of Trenton, and the Battle of Princeton.<sup>17</sup> Despite the wartime contributions of black Continental

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<sup>15</sup> Cerasini, *Heroes*, 17–20, 25; Millett and Shulimson, eds., *Commandants of the Marine Corps*, 65; Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 44–45.

<sup>16</sup> The efforts of the U.S. Marines in this battle and subsequent occupation of Mexico City are memorialized by the opening lines of the Marines' Hymn, "From the Halls of Montezuma...." Marine tradition maintains that the red stripe worn on the trousers of the Dress Blues uniform, commonly known as the "blood stripe," symbolizes the blood shed by the Marines who stormed the castle of Chapultepec in 1847.

<sup>17</sup> The first African American Marine in recorded history was a slave known as John Martin or "Keto," who served during the American Revolution. Martin was the "property" of William Marshall of Wilmington, Delaware. In April 1776, he was recruited and enlisted into the Continental service without his owner's knowledge and served aboard the *Reprisal* until October 1777—Martin died when the ship foundered off the Newfoundland Banks in October 1777. See

Marines such as Walker and “Orange,” their service went unrecognized and unappreciated, which began a trend of the future treatment and recognition of black wartime participation in the United States Marine Corps.

The Continental Marines ceased to exist within a year after the signing of the Treaty of Paris on April 11, 1783. When the U.S. Marine Corps formed in 1798, Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert *officially* banned “Negroes, Mulattoes and Indians,” from joining, grouping them with “persons whose characters are suspicious.”<sup>18</sup> The Commandant of the reestablished Marine Corps, Major William Ward Burrows, followed the Navy’s policy and barred African Americans from enlisting. Though the Navy enlisted blacks after 1811, on January 1, 1863, the U.S. Marine Corps rejected the opportunity to follow the example of the U.S. Army and open its ranks to African American volunteers. For the next seventy-nine years, the Marines Corps continued to deny African Americans the opportunity to serve in its ranks.<sup>19</sup>

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Smith, *Marines in the Revolution*, 63; Shaw and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, ix; Nalty, *Right to Fight*, 2.

<sup>18</sup> On March 16, 1798, Benjamin Stoddert prescribed a set of rules governing the enrollment of Marines for the *Constellation*, which provided that only whites be authorized to enlist. See Office of Naval Records and Library, *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi-War between the United States and France: Naval Operations from February 1797 to October 1798*, Vol. 1, 1935–1938, Record Group 45: Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library, 1691–1945 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration), 41; Shaw and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, ix; David F. Winkler, “The Montford Point Marines,” *Seapower* 54 (September 2011): 60.

<sup>19</sup> Office of Naval Records and Library, *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi-War between the United States and France*, 41. African American enlistees of the Navy are among the oldest serving groups in the U.S. military. Although the official title of the Navy was not designated, the early frigates and vessels used African Americans as seamen in a variety of assignments. By the War of 1812, blacks were serving on both British and U.S. Navy ships.



From its origins during the late eighteenth-century the Marine Corps began and maintained an official 144-year tradition of racial exclusiveness. In 1939, when war broke out in Europe, the situation of African Americans in the military reflected their status in society as a whole. It is not surprising, then, that in April 1941, during a meeting of the General Board of the Navy the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Major General Thomas Holcomb, publicly declared his opposition to any change in the prevailing policy concerning blacks. He saw the Marines as an exclusive club that blacks had no right to join. Incredulous to the thought of blacks donning the U.S. Marine Corps's official emblem: the eagle, globe, and anchor, Holcomb reputedly stated, "If it were a question of having a Marine Corps of 5,000 Whites or 250,000 Negroes, I would rather have the whites." Holcomb believed there would be a "definite loss of efficiency in the Marine Corps if we have to take Negroes."<sup>20</sup> As a result, the Marine Corps

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During the American Civil War, large numbers of African Americans enlisted in the Union Navy and served on board wooden and ironclad ships and gunboats. Racial policies kept the number of African Americans low by assigning them to lesser classifications such as messmen and stewards in later wars. During World War II, enlistments of African Americans in the Navy rose with the establishment of all black crews on selected U.S. ships. Although the Navy officially lifted "racial restrictions" by 1946, it was not until the Korean War (1950–1953) that the Navy fully integrated African Americans. See Dennis D. Nelson, *The Integration of the Negro into the U.S. Navy* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1951), 1–9; Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II*, 26; Winkler, "The Montford Point Marines," 60.

<sup>20</sup> Major General Thomas Holcomb's testimony during the hearings of the General Board of the United States Navy, dated January 23, 1942. Subject: "Enlistment of Men of Colored Race," Record Group 428: General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1941–2004. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration), 18. To a certain extent, this prevailing sentiment was based on an ill-conceived 1925 Army War College study, which concluded that African Americans were genetically inferior to whites, unfit to fight, unintelligent, and submissive; suffered from low self-esteem; were easily manipulated; and were likely to crumble under fire. See Major General H.E. Ely, "The Use of Negro Manpower in

maintained its inflexible policy of excluding African Americans. But on June 25, 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, establishing the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC).<sup>21</sup> This executive order opened the door for blacks to serve in all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. Roosevelt's order officially permitted African Americans, for the first time since 1798, to join the Marine Corps, the only branch that then excluded blacks from entering its ranks.

The Marine Corps's response was to admit blacks but train them in an isolated and separate camp and then assign them to remote duty stations. Between August 1942 and September 1949, Camp Montford Point, a segregated recruit depot located in Jacksonville, North Carolina, was the training ground for more than 20,000 African

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War," *The Army War College Report of 1925*, Record Group 165: Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, 1860–1952 (Washington, D.C.: College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).

<sup>21</sup> In early July 1941, millions of jobs were being created, primarily in urban areas, as the United States prepared for war. When large numbers of African Americans moved to cities in the north and west to work in defense industries, they were often met with violence and discrimination. In response, A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and other black leaders, met with Eleanor Roosevelt and members of the President's cabinet. During these meetings, Randolph presented a list of grievances regarding the civil rights of African Americans, demanding that an executive order be issued to stop job discrimination in the defense industry. Randolph, with others, threatened that they were prepared to bring "ten, twenty, fifty thousand Negroes on the White House lawn" if their demands were not met. After consultation with his advisers, Roosevelt responded to the black leaders and issued Executive Order 8802, which declared, "There shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries and in Government, because of race, creed, color, or national origin." It was the first Presidential directive on race since the Reconstruction. The order also established the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to investigate incidents of discrimination. See Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Executive Order 8802: "Prohibition of Discrimination in the Defense Industry," June 25, 1941, Record Group 11: General Records of the United States Government, 1778–1992 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration). See also Appendix A.

American recruits. In addition, the creation of Montford Point enabled racial discrimination and segregation to remain prevalent in the lives of black and white Marines. Nevertheless, Montford Point brought about a change that allowed black Marines to make significant military contributions when the United States needed its citizenry to think beyond its own ethnic groups and racial stereotypes.<sup>22</sup>

The mention of black Marines is almost an aside in Marine Corps and American military history publications. The Tuskegee Airmen and the Buffalo Soldiers of the old frontier cavalry have attracted great interest, receiving considerable scholarly attention and exposure in the popular media, yet the Marines of Montford Point remain virtually unknown.<sup>23</sup> The lack of information on the subject of black Marines is not only a large gap in military historiography but also in the history of World War II.

There has long been a need for systematic studies of African American Marines' role not just during World War II, but also in all U.S. military history. Although a few articles and books have been written on these topics, research concerning the military achievements and wartime contributions of black Marines remains sparse.

In *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (1991) Allan R. Millett concludes that during the early 1940s, Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC) "had no taste for social experiments in the midst of war." Concerned about black cooperation in the war effort and later elections, the Roosevelt administration insisted

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<sup>22</sup> Camp Montford Point's facilities were far inferior to those in the white sections of Camp Lejeune. See Carole Moore, "Rank Discrimination," *History Channel Magazine* 59 (September/October 2008): 9; Ronald K. Culp, *The First Black United States Marines: The Men of Montford Point, 1942–1946* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007), 1–2.

<sup>23</sup> Thompson, "Montford Point Marines," 33.

that the Marine Corps create a few all-black units (officered by whites) in 1942. Reluctant to place blacks in combat units for fear of their supposed ineffectiveness, HQMC recognized “the right of blacks to fight and even acknowledged that blacks had some technical skills.” Thus, the Marine Corps organized its first black recruits into a composite defense battalion.<sup>24</sup> In doing so, the Marine Corps carefully screened and matched black recruits with selected white commissioned and non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and placed them at Montford Point. HQMC had determined that using this measure yielded positive results and proclaimed that the Corps’s first black unit was a success—even though their treatment and care was contrary to that of their white counterparts in the “regular” Marine Corps. However, as training progressed, black NCOs assumed the responsibility of training their recruits to Marine Corps proficiency in base defense artillery and machine gun training.<sup>25</sup>

Still pressed to enlist more African Americans, the Corps responded by creating sixty-three black *depot* and *ammunition companies*, a designation that essentially translated to “labor units.” Taking into account the organization’s chronic lack of manpower for beach labor troops, some of these companies turned out to provide vital

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<sup>24</sup> Composite: A unit including all combat arms of the ground forces composed of artillery, anti-aircraft, machine guns, tanks, foot-mobile infantry, and billets for recruits who are skilled in various trades and occupations such as radio operators, electricians, accountants, carpenters, draftsmen, band musicians, riggers and blacksmiths. See Appendix B. See also Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 374; Thompson, “Montford Point Marines,” 33; Shaw and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 95–96.

<sup>25</sup> The first battalion of blacks enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves, not “Regulars” during the months of June and July 1942, and was temporarily placed in an inactive duty status until the completion of Camp Montford Point. See Appendix B. See also Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 374; Thompson, “Montford Point Marines,” 33.

support for combat landings in the Pacific and occasionally served as infantrymen. By the end of the war, more than 15,000 blacks had worn Marine Corps “green,” a figure considerably less than 10 percent of the Marine Corps’s total strength, which, in 1943, was the administrative goal for African American representation in the USMC.<sup>26</sup>

While serving in the Pacific, black Marines faced immense racial discrimination and constant frustration, mostly in their interactions with white enlisted Marines and sailors. Despite their frustrations, black Marines served admirably and with enthusiasm. Even with overcoming limitations on their service in the Pacific (i.e., denied officer commissions and service in combat occupational specialties), “African American Marines could do nothing to forestall the intentions of Headquarters Marine Corps to disband each of the black units after the war.”<sup>27</sup>

In reference to the role of the 51st and 52nd Defense Battalions, Millett’s effective summary provides less detail than described by Henry I. Shaw, Jr. and Ralph W. Donnelly in *Blacks in the Marine Corps* (1975). Shaw and Donnelly emphasize that

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<sup>26</sup> Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 375. Despite the obvious inconsistencies with democratic principles, the War Department retained its policy of racial segregation with its component of discrimination and its quota system by which the number of African Americans in the military was not to exceed their percentage of the total population. In 1940, prevalent discrimination in America was made manifest through the administration of the Selective Service Act. Under it 1,765,917 blacks registered for military service—almost 11 percent of the total registration. Of the entire U.S. population, the 1940 census reported between 9.8 and 10.3 percent as the black population. Blacks were grossly underrepresented in the selection apparatus. African Americans were in all branches of the armed forces, but it was token representation only. By 1943, in the U.S. Army, 90 percent of African American soldiers were engaged in some sort of labor; ten percent were in combat units, with less than half actually engaged in combat. See Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History: A New Perspective* (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1974), 133–143.

<sup>27</sup> Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 375; Culp, *First Black United States Marines*, 226–228.

although the Defense Battalions' role was classified as "combat" toward the end of 1942, the nature of the defense battalion had begun to change. The Marine Corps shifted the mission of the battalions from "repulsing amphibious landings to strictly defending against Japanese airstrikes and hit-and-run raids by warships."<sup>28</sup> However, Millett supports Shaw and Donnelly's assertion that the Marine Corps was chronically short-handed for beach labor troops to support units that made combat landings in the South Pacific, which allowed for black Marines to *occasionally* serve as infantrymen. These *labor* troops/units (ammunition and depot companies) were not *initially* assigned or trained to serve as combat units; notwithstanding, they participated in plenty of combat and supported amphibious landings on some of the war's bloodiest beaches, including the islands of Saipan, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.<sup>29</sup> Shaw and Donnelly further

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<sup>28</sup> Throughout the first six months that African Americans served in the USMC, the focus of attention was on the 51st Composite Defense Battalion. It was to be the first (and for a time, the only) black combat unit. Its initial stages of training were hampered by equipment shortages, but even more by the complete unfamiliarity of the men with the weapons and supporting equipment they were issued. Despite having numerous trained and qualified white instructors and officers, the unit's biggest shortfall was its progress in training due to the fact that it did not have an experienced cadre of men on which to build. Moreover, it must be taken into account that the 51st was activated on August 18, 1942 and the 52nd on December 15, 1943—the 51st did not deploy to the Pacific until 1944. See Shaw and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marines Corps*, 15–19, 95–96; Nalty, *Right to Fight*, 11.

<sup>29</sup> See Edward Andrusko, *Love and War Beneath the Southern Cross: A World War II Memoir from the South Pacific Islands and Australia* (N.P.: Andrusko, 2003), 193; "Saipan Landing a Grim Ordeal Of 'Taking' Rain of Mortar Fire," *New York Times*, July 2, 1944; "Saipan Raids Cost Japan 13 Aircraft," *New York Times*, November 29, 1944; "Books of the Times," *New York Times*, October 4, 1945. See also Gene Doughty, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin. (June 29, 2005), [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Doughty\\_Gene.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Doughty_Gene.html) (hereafter cited as Doughty interview); Doughty quoted in Clarence E. Willie, *African American Voices From Iwo*

emphasize the irony of the service of black Marines in the defense battalions: The defense battalions had been designated, trained, and publicized as combat organizations, yet neither battalion saw combat.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the creation of these “labor units,” African American Marines served courageously in the Pacific; at Saipan, for example, Private First Class (PFC) LeRoy Seals became the first black Marine killed in action (KIA). On Guam, PFC Luther Woodard received the Silver Star when “he discovered the footprints left by a half-dozen Japanese, followed the trail to the place where the enemy diehards were hiding, and

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*Jima: Personal Accounts of the Battle* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010), 87; Winkler, “The Montford Point Marines,” 60; Doughty quoted in Gail Buckley, *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm* (New York: Random House, 2001), 320–321; Steven Robinson, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin. (June 29, 2005), [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Robinson\\_Steven.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Robinson_Steven.html) (hereafter cited as Robinson interview).

<sup>30</sup> Shaw and Donnelly, detail the structure and evolution of the black composite defense battalions as the war progressed, pointing out that African American Marines that served as members in the ammunition and depot companies in support of combat landings suffered approximately 100 combat casualties. See Shaw and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 15–46; Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 375; Culp, *The First Black United States Marines*, 81–85; Ron Field and Alexander Bielakowski, *Buffalo Soldiers: African American Troops in the US Forces, 1866–1945* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 208–212; George W. Garand and Truman R. Strobbridge’s *Western Pacific Operations: History of the U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, Volume IV (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1971), 28; Benis M. Frank and Henry I. Shaw, Jr.’s *Victory and Occupation: History of the U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, Volume V (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1968), 687–689, total 1,793 pages, yet commits less than five pages to the mention of black Marines’ participation in World War II. Nonetheless, Garand, Strobbridge, Frank and Shaw do provide detailed information in describing the roles of the first and second black (composite) defense battalions during this period of the war. See Charles L. Updegraph, Jr., *U.S. Marine Corps Special Units of World War II* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1972; reprinted 1977), 61–77, 92.

reportedly killed at least one of them. He returned later with five other members of his ammunition company and attacked the remaining survivors.” In all, approximately 8,000 black stevedores and ammunition handlers braved Japanese fire on the Pacific beachheads.<sup>31</sup> Shaw, Donnelly, Ron Field and Alexander Bielakowski are the only authors (other than Ronald K. Culp and Melton A. McLaurin, who will be mentioned later) to address the military achievements and wartime contributions of African American Marines.

In *The United States Marines, 1775–1975* (1976) and *The United States Marines: A History* (2003), General Edwin Howard Simmons devotes fewer than eight pages to the service of blacks in the Marine Corps. Nonetheless, Simmons briefly highlights issues similar to Field and Bielakowski: That even though the Corps accepted African Americans there was no great rush of Negro volunteers to join the USMC, since it was commonly known for its racial exclusivity. Of the 19,168 black Americans who served as Marines during World War II, 16,039 were drafted, 3,129 volunteered, and 12,738 served overseas.<sup>32</sup>

Shaw and Donnelly, Simmons, Field and Bielakowski, all recognize the racial components that dominated Marine Corps life during the World War II era. Simmons,

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<sup>31</sup> Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 201. See also Andrusko, *Love and War Beneath the Southern Cross*, 193; “Saipan Landing a Grim Ordeal Of ‘Taking’ Rain of Mortar Fire,” *New York Times*, July 2, 1944; “Saipan Raids Cost Japan 13 Aircraft,” *New York Times*, November 29, 1944; “Books of the Times,” *New York Times*, October 4, 1945; Robinson interview; Doughty interview; Doughty quoted in Willie, *African American Voices From Iwo Jima*, 87; Doughty quoted in Buckley, *American Patriots*, 320–321.

<sup>32</sup> Edwin H. Simmons, *The United States Marines, 1775–1975* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 221–223; Field and Bielakowski, *Buffalo Soldiers*, 206–208.



however, expands the view of African American wartime participation; he carries his work beyond the enlisted ranks and into the officer ranks, revealing the effects of the Marine Corps's discriminatory past on subsequent generations of black Marine officers.

As late as April 1944, Headquarters Marine Corps was recommending against “colored” officers. A year later, the first three black officer candidates reported to Quantico, Virginia for Officer Candidate School (OCS). “All had clean service records and had proven themselves to be qualified and capable Marines: one was a sergeant major, two were first sergeants; all three were college graduates, and all three failed out of OCS—one physically, the other two academically.”<sup>33</sup> The first black second lieutenant in the Marine Corps Reserve (Frederick C. Branch of Charlotte, North Carolina) was not commissioned until November 10, 1945, and then was placed immediately on the inactive list. It would not be until May 28, 1948 that another African American would receive a regular commission. By 1996 there were 288 black Marine officers on active duty, including one brigadier general. In 1944, the highest-ranking officer in the U.S. Army was a brigadier general.<sup>34</sup> This sample elucidates the depth and

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<sup>33</sup> According to Gene Doughty, a Montford Point Marine, those who failed to complete OCS were found to have health issues. He reveals that the Marine Corps used “minor health issues” as a way to keep blacks from becoming officers. Montford Pointer Sam Saxton, who served during World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, stated: “the Marine Corps was pretty racist at that time.... they simply didn’t want us to become officers, that’s all there is to it.” See Jeffries, “The Marine Corps’ First Black Commissioned Officer,” 388; Shaw and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 47–49; Nalty, *Right to Fight*, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Regarding the prohibition on black officers, see Shaw and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 47–49; Nalty, *Right to Fight*, 2, 4; Edwin Howard Simmons, *The United States Marines: A History* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2003), 7, 186–189; Appendix C. See also Memorandum, Negroes in the Armed Forces. White House File, Philleo Nash Papers, 1945,

longevity of the Marine Corps's discriminatory practices and efforts to avoid admitting blacks into its ranks.

Only a few studies have recognized the World War II military contributions and participation of African American Marines. The most notable work is Milton A. McLaurin's *The Marines of Montford Point: America's First Black Marines* (2007), an important collection of interviews with sixty-one veterans. McLaurin documents the experiences of the first black Marines from their induction through their training and combat experiences, clearly describing their struggles against racism, segregation, and discrimination—both in the military and civilian domain. McLaurin concludes that these men laid the foundation for long-term integration of the Marine Corps and made possible a career in the Corps for the thousands of young African Americans who followed them.

*The First Black United States Marines: The Men of Montford Point, 1942–1946* (2007) by Ronald Culp is a suitable complement to McLaurin's work. In a straightforward narrative, Culp chronicles the struggles and achievements of Montford Pointers, arguing that the black Marines in the Solomon and Marianas Islands as well as in Okinawa, Japan faced pervasive racial harassment, which remained constant throughout each phase of the war. He describes the creation of the defense battalions and ammunition and depot companies, emphasizing their significance in creating opportunities for blacks to fight and prove themselves among their white peers. One of the main weaknesses of Culp's work, however, is its non-critical approach toward the Marine Corps's racist treatment of enlisted blacks and a lack of criticism of the racial

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Record Group 228: Records of the Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1940–1946  
(Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).

attitudes of the white officers' corps. In addition, Culp does not sufficiently analyze the societal forces that vehemently resisted all measures taken toward racial integration.

Culp and McLaurin both stress the role of Montford Point, the daily struggles of African American Marines, their legacy, and their contributions as (full-fledged) citizens to a nation that would not accept them as equal citizens. These authors provide the most thorough explanations thus far on how black Marines laid the foundation for long-term integration. Culp and McLaurin both emphasize how Montford Pointers served in three wars during a time when racial discrimination and segregation remained legal throughout the American South.

Culp and McLaurin call attention to aspects of African American Marines' service that are little known. For example, African American Marines did not *officially* hold combat arms Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) until the Vietnam War, illustrating that black Marines have not received the appropriate public attention and recognition for serving as members attached to combat units.<sup>35</sup> Despite their commendable service during World War II, black Marines were not fully accepted into American society. Furthermore, the USMC, steeped in segregationist policies and practices, reduced the percentage of blacks in its service after World War II. It took the Korean War to finally persuade the reluctant and stubborn Marine Corps to integrate its

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<sup>35</sup> See Edward Andrusko, interviewed by Cameron D. McCoy, August 12, 2011 (hereafter cited as Andrusko interview); Andrusko, *Love and War Beneath the Southern Cross*, 193–200; Doughty interview; Doughty quoted in Willie, *African American Voices From Iwo Jima*, 87; Doughty quoted in Buckley, *American Patriots*, 320–321.

ranks and combat units.<sup>36</sup> Once accepted, African American Marines quickly demonstrated their ability to fight proficiently side-by-side with fellow Marines of every ethnic and racial background.

Culp and McLaurin provide firsthand accounts of poignant testimonies of America's first black Marines, describing a picture of an African American viewpoint of not only a struggle but also achievement. Together the authors capture the nuances of military life, civilian life and the cultures encountered in the Pacific by blacks. Using information gleaned from black Marines stationed in Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Guam and the Mariana Islands, Culp and McLaurin focus attention on America's deeply rooted traditions and social climate that remained constant throughout each war. Yet, with their focus on the Marines themselves, these authors do not thoroughly address key issues such as the pivotal voices (civilian and military) involved in persuading the armed forces and the Marine Corps to open its ranks to African Americans.

Several works provide context for Culp and McLaurin's accounts. These include Gerald Astor's *The Right to Fight: A History of African Americans in the Military* (2001), Bernard C. Nalty's *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (1986), Nalty's *The Right to Fight: African-American Marines in World War II* (1994), and Shaw and Donnelly's *Blacks in the Marine Corps* (1975). All three scholars emphasize the basic racial policy of the Marine Corps, the beginnings of Camp Montford Point, the camp's first graduates, overseas assignments, combat and occupation duties, returning home, and the legacy of the Marines of Montford Point.

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<sup>36</sup> McLaurin, *Marines of Montford Point*, 10; Culp, *First Black United States Marines*, 226–228.

Unlike Astor, Culp, and McLaurin, Bernard C. Nalty, one of the outstanding historians on this topic, details the role of Colonel Samuel A. Woods, Jr., who established Camp Montford Point and served as the first commanding officer of the 51st Defense Battalion (Composite).<sup>37</sup> Colonel Woods, a South Carolina native, launched the training program for black Marines to train at Camp Montford Point. At this time, based on the Army's practices, the top brass of the Marine Corps believed that officers born in the South were uniquely suited to command African Americans, and Colonel Woods fit this pattern.<sup>38</sup> The colonel's calmness and fairness earned him the respect of the blacks he commanded; though he accepted the separation of the races, Woods insisted that black Marines "exhibit self-pride and competence." He cultivated a paternalistic relationship with his men and emerged, according to one Montford Pointer, as "the Great White Father of everybody," trying to ease the impact of segregation on the morale of his troops.<sup>39</sup>

The legacy of Montford Point and the men who trained at the camp extended far beyond the parameters of the segregated facility. When Montford Point closed the Marine Corps began sending black recruits to its previously established all-white training depots at Parris Island, South Carolina, and Camp Pendleton, California. Few Montford Pointers served in the USMC by the time of the Vietnam War; nevertheless, due to the efforts of these pioneers, African American Marines that did serve, now

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<sup>37</sup> Nalty, *Right to Fight*, 6. For more on Composite, see Appendix B.

<sup>38</sup> Robert F. Jefferson, *Fighting for Hope: African American Troops of the 93rd Infantry Division in World War II and Postwar America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 83, 83n106.

<sup>39</sup> Nalty, *Right to Fight*, 6.

served in a military organization that had profoundly changed since the initial days of Montford Point. A fully integrated Marine Corps was now in existence, which included black officers. Despite the fact that historians and scholars have paid little attention to the wartime contributions and significance of African American Marines, and that little has been written about Camp Montford Point and the first black Marines compared to the more popular Buffalo Soldiers and Tuskegee Airmen, these works are an invaluable contribution to not only the literature on blacks in the USMC, but provide further insight and understanding of the complete black military experience during World War II.<sup>40</sup>

World War II marked a significant turning point in the status of African American men in the U.S. Armed Forces. During the 1940s opportunities expanded and also contracted for African American men. Historians have started to address and discuss several factors related to the military service of blacks in the Marine Corps; and as accounts of African American Marines in World War II have increased, the principle conversations and investigations surrounding their participation during the war centers on several major topics that demand attention: Their enthusiasm and hesitation to join the Marines, their knowledge of the Marine Corps during the 1940s, their wartime assignments, the prevailing attitudes of the time—both black and white, and their character of service. This thesis will examine how these topics shaped the attitudes of black Marines and white American society. To better appreciate and understand the nature and character of service of black Marines during this era, it is first necessary to

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<sup>40</sup> Culp's *First Black United States Marines* and McLaurin's *Marines of Montford Point* provide the best introductory accounts regarding the service of black Marines during the Second World War.

understand the domestic environment in which these men were raised and the perspectives they gained growing up *north* and *south* of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Chapter II of this thesis will describe the southern Jim Crow experiences of selected northern black Marine enlistees, and focus on the variety of ways in which northern blacks behaved toward and responded to southern racism. It will examine how some of these men passively accepted racism and segregation while others responded aggressively and challenged the rules of racial engagement in the South. This chapter will briefly discuss the reasons why these men joined the most racist branch of the military and what knowledge they had of Executive Order 8802 and the Navy Department's May 20, 1942, press release, announcing the Marine Corps's plans for recruiting blacks. It also will emphasize that the central issue for northern blacks who entered the Marine Corps during World War II, and trained in the South, was that northern racism was fundamentally different from southern racism.

In contrast to Chapter II, Chapter III examines the various ways in which southern black Marine recruits coped with *official* Jim Crow laws. It will explore the realities that black and white American society created about all African American Marines and their wartime service to a nation that regarded them as second-rate, and briefly discuss how northern and southern black enlistees engaged and interacted within a segregationist Marine Corps. This chapter also explains how the Marine Corps manipulated the Selective Service in order to protect what senior officers considered its

elitist image based, in part, on limiting its membership to white volunteers.<sup>41</sup> Throughout the course of World War II, and by the actions of African American Marines, initial racial opinions shifted and a new tradition of Marine Corps service began.

Chapter IV introduces alternative approaches to utilizing blacks in other branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. It evaluates the role of African Americans who had participated in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) program, and based on the framework of the CCC, concludes that the White House could have applied pressure to the Marine Corps to commission blacks. Additionally, it examines how the U.S. Army made greater strides toward racial justice and equality by allowing blacks to serve as commissioned officers, although in segregated units; whereas the Marine Corps instituted no comparable reform during the war. Furthermore, this chapter contends that the Marine Corps could have commissioned blacks by following three salient examples selected for comparison: The Army's model of task organization and combat employment of black soldiers in the 93rd Infantry Division, which deployed to the Pacific, and the 99th Pursuit Squadron and the 332nd Fighter Group, America's first all-black flying units (the Tuskegee Airmen). Apart from fighting endless bouts of racism within their service communities, these units serve as examples of the Army's steps toward affording African Americans greater opportunities to serve in technical and frontline combat occupational specialties and assignments, rather than limited to

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<sup>41</sup> The draft for World War II officially began on September 16, 1940. Blacks were not officially permitted to enter the Marine Corps until May 20, 1942; the draft did not become the normal source for recruits in all the service branches until December 1942, and the first black Marine draftees did not enter the USMC until January 1943. See Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 3; Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History*, 142–145.



noncombat assignments (i.e., by restricting blacks to auxiliary/service and support units) in accordance with Marine Corps directives.

Despite overwhelming evidence of the South's brutal enforcement of Jim Crow laws against black service members, African American Marines stayed the course. These men knew the changes occurring in the Marine Corps were positive and sought to embrace the future challenges of the armed forces. Chapter V will address and summarize the World War II legacy of African American Marines and their place in Marine Corps and U.S. military history, and demonstrate that World War II *officially* marked the beginning of an African American tradition of service in the United States Marine Corps.

## CHAPTER II

### BLACK YANKEES AND SOUTHERN JIM CROW

For the young black Marine draftees and volunteers raised north of the Mason-Dixon Line, traveling into the segregated South presented an unforeseen and ruthless introduction to the southern system of Jim Crow. Their journey from locations such as Illinois, Indiana, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania proceeded normally until their trains reached Washington, D.C., the capital of the nation they pledged to defend with their lives. Upon arriving in Washington each of these men was forced to abide by the racial laws of a white southern society determined to enforce the doctrine of white supremacy.<sup>1</sup>

Historian Thomas J. Sugrue contends that north of the Mason-Dixon Line there were no *official* Jim Crow laws. Theoretically, during the early 1940s, all public accommodations were equally available to whites and blacks. Restrooms were not segregated, blacks and whites shared the same drinking fountains, and seating aboard commercial transportation was no longer such a contentious issue.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding these facts, racism and segregation did exist in the North. For many African Americans in the North, circumstances regarding segregation evolved in complexity and uncertainty, becoming more confusing as World War II progressed. During this period,

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<sup>1</sup> Melton A. McLaurin, *The Marines of Montford Point: America's First Black Marines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 36.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle For Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 130. The term “enlistees” includes “draftees.”

white sections of northern cities “had widely varying reputations” from “relatively accommodating” to outward hostility towards African American residents and visitors.<sup>3</sup>

With many aspects of life in the North, negotiating racism and segregation was “exhausting, demoralizing, and often dangerous” for blacks. Law enforcement officers were central figures in enforcing the practice of segregation in public life. Northern protest at public places usually did not bring the full force of police authority to bear, “because unlike in the South, challenges to northern Jim Crow laws were not direct affronts to the states in most cases.” Regardless of the law, northern police officers ruthlessly guarded the color line with little sympathy toward African Americans who attempted to negotiate the parameters of race relations. On the other hand, Sugrue argues that there were instances in which the police took a stance of indifference, “unwilling to intervene in what they viewed as disputes between private parties.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 131. For more background information on black urban communities and metropolises in the North, see Kenneth L. Kusmer’s *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870–1930* in which he discusses the status of African Americans in Ohio’s biggest city, where restrictions on African Americans existed under the Constitution of Ohio and the state Black Laws. Kusmer describes Cleveland before 1870, calling attention to the intensification of racism and the mood of whites (during the Great Migration), who were against legitimizing blacks as American citizens. He extends his analysis of Cleveland’s ghetto with comparisons to other cities, using sources such as David M. Katzman’s *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (1973), Henry R. Clayton’s *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (1945), and Allan H. Spear’s *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890–1920* (1967), which roughly covers the same time period of Kusmer’s work. Kusmer’s comparison of these other works addresses the general patterns in black urban communities and to the expansion and association these urban centers shared with regard to population increase and racial segregation. See also Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 131–132, 134.

This inconsistent behavior among local law enforcement and the white community, according to Sugrue and other scholars, is what “made [navigating] northern racial barriers so frustrating.” The enforcement of racial discrimination and segregation could be executed at times just as swift and harsh as it was in the South—however, at the same time, it was “surprisingly and unpredictably flexible.” “The rules of racial engagement in the North were seldom posted. And a countervailing set of rules—state civil rights laws, many dating to the nineteenth century—*promised* African Americans that the strong arm of the law would be on their side.”<sup>5</sup> Despite the unpredictable and precarious nature of northern racism and discrimination, these types of civil rights laws were rejected and unaccepted south of the Mason-Dixon Line.

This chapter describes the southern Jim Crow experiences of selected northern black Marine enlistees, and focuses on the variety of ways in which northern blacks behaved toward and responded to southern racism. It examines how some of these men passively accepted racism and segregation while others responded aggressively and challenged the rules of racial engagement in the South. This chapter briefly discusses the reasons why these men joined the most racist branch of the military and what knowledge they had of Executive Order 8802 and the Navy Department’s May 20, 1942, press release, announcing the USMC’s plans for recruiting African Americans. It also

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<sup>5</sup> By World War II, eighteen northern and western states had civil rights laws forbidding discrimination or segregation in public accommodations. Those states were California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Washington, and Wisconsin. See Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 131–132, 134, 579n133; Lawrence Dunbar Reddick, “What the Northern Negro Thinks About Democracy,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 17 (January 1944): 296.

emphasizes that the central issue for northern blacks who entered the Marine Corps during World War II, and trained in the South, was that northern racism was fundamentally different from southern racism.<sup>6</sup>

As northern blacks transitioned to a new way of life south of the Mason-Dixon Line, they were especially shocked at the pervasiveness of southern Jim Crow laws. As residents of northern states, black enlistees' accommodation skills to southern racism were tested while traveling to the South and living in North Carolina. These men shared similar experiences in dealing with southern racial prejudice at different times during the war, and provided an example of either an aggressive or passive response to segregation and racial discrimination in the South.<sup>7</sup>

Northern blacks entered the Marine Corps under various circumstances and various reasons. Some joined to avoid the draft—the majority were drafted—while others enlisted to select the branch of service of their choice. Several knew that blacks had not been previously admitted into the Marines, many knew nothing of the Corps's bigoted past, and others joined specifically to ensure that the Marine Corps's policy of

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<sup>6</sup> In this chapter, the wording and quotations of Charles Davenport (1942), Steven Robinson (1942), Lawrence Diggs (drafted in 1943), Gene Doughty (1943), Archibald Mosely (1943), George Taylor (drafted in 1943), Roland Durden (1944), Norman Payne (1944), Averet Corley (drafted in 1945), and David Dinkins (drafted in 1945) are unaltered from the original with the exception of a few grammatical changes for clarity. Each of these men entered the Marine Corps from 1942 through 1945 respectively. This sample of published/recorded interviews used throughout this thesis are small (approximately 22), however, it is representative of the African Americans that entered the Marine Corps as volunteers and draftees during this period. These interviews are from the archives at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington.

<sup>7</sup> Peter S. Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers: Ground Combat in the World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 269, 369n11.

racial exclusivity ended. On the other hand, the northern black Marine enlistees who were unaware of the organization's racist history had no idea they would be sent to a segregated training facility. Ultimately, these men were determined not just to complete basic training successfully, but excel, and prove to white America they could be exemplary Marines.<sup>8</sup>

Those who did volunteer to serve in the Corps did not want to solely endure the racial prejudice of a white society and abide by segregationist state laws; this was their opportunity to substantiate their value to the United States as legitimate warfighters. These men wanted to carry and hold the torch high not only for what journalist Tom Brokaw called the *Greatest Generation*, but for themselves and their communities. Of the 19,168 African American Marines who served during World War II, only 3,129 volunteered. Many, for reasons previously mentioned, joined the Corps with the belief that they would be transformed into men.

For example, during May of 1942, Charles Davenport from Monongahela, Pennsylvania, heard on the radio that President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed a law that permitted black people to enlist in the Marine Corps;<sup>9</sup> subsequently he enlisted on November 27, 1942, fully aware of the Marine Corps's previous racial policy. His older brother had enlisted in the Army in 1940, but Davenport wanted to be a Marine. At that time the Army was the only outfit permitting a combat role for blacks. The Navy was

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<sup>8</sup> McLaurin, *Marines of Montford Point*, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Department of the Navy, "Marines Announce Plans for Recruiting African-Americans," Department of the Navy, May 20, 1942, Record Group 428: General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1941–2004 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration). See also Appendix B.

recruiting blacks but assigning them to the steward's branch, which Davenport found demeaning: "I wasn't going in [to] a branch of service and shine pots and pans, and, cook food, things like that. So, the Navy was definitely out, and the Marine Corps had no options at that time." Upon enlisting, Davenport stated, "It was in me to show that even though I was small in stature, I was big enough and strong enough, and willing to be in the best fighting force they had, and I joined the Marines."<sup>10</sup> Davenport is one of the few northern Marine enlistees to specifically recall hearing President Roosevelt's May 20, 1942 announcement and understood the immediate consequences that resulted from this change in racial policy.

For Roland Durden, who entered the Corps from Harlem, New York in March 1944, the motivation to serve in the Marines came from the big screen, "During that time we had a lot of movies that promoted loyalty and camaraderie and heroes. So, I think maybe I was influenced that way." Durden, who knew nothing of the Marine Corps's past regarding its exclusion of blacks, desired the training and experience of the military. When Durden turned 18, his only concern was to join the Marines; in addition, he provided a key factor that aided in his eagerness to enlist in 1943 after completing high school: "Plus I couldn't get a decent job at that time, even in war."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> During World War II, Davenport served in the Marshall Islands; he also served in Korea, leaving the Marine Corps in 1957 with the rank of Gunnery Sergeant. See Charles Davenport, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, June 25, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Davenport\\_Charles.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Davenport_Charles.html) (hereafter cited as Davenport interview); Davenport also quoted in McLaurin, *Marines of Montford Point*, 26, 185.

<sup>11</sup> Corporal Roland Durden served in the Pacific, participated in the invasion of Iwo Jima, Japan and was discharged in 1946. See Roland Durden, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin,

After graduating from high school, Steven Robinson from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, joined the Marines in September 1942. At the time, Robinson was unaware that there had been an organized effort to block African Americans from joining the Corps. When asked if he had any regrets or if his decision would have been influenced in any way after realizing there were no African Americans in the Marines prior to 1942, Robinson replied: “I don’t know. I was pretty ambivalent ... I mean it; at 17, I wanted to enlist. I wanted to become a Marine ... the fact that there had been no other African Americans before me really didn’t enter into my mind.”<sup>12</sup> Robinson is in the majority with regard to those who entered the Marine Corps without any previous knowledge of either Executive Order 8802 or the Navy Department’s May 20, 1942, press release.

Like many northern blacks entering the Marine Corps, Robinson had never before traveled to the South. Traveling on the train to North Carolina, for the first time, he experienced segregated railroad passenger cars and stations: “... as far as I know, I never saw anybody on there that looked like me but me. The rest [of the passengers] were white.” After detraining in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, Robinson immediately encountered racial opposition when a train station attendant curtly instructed him to leave the station. As Robinson walked out of the train station he recalled how this

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July 23, 2004, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Durden\\_Roland.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Durden_Roland.html) (hereafter cited as Durden interview).

<sup>12</sup> Sergeant Steven Robinson saw combat during the invasion of Iwo Jima, Japan. Sergeant Robinson was discharged from the Marine Corps at the end of the war; he is now deceased. See Steven Robinson, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, June 29, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Robinson\\_Steven.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Robinson_Steven.html) (hereafter cited as Robinson interview).



particular experience devastated him: “I looked over at the station, at the entrance to the station, and I saw a sign *For White Only*. Now, I heard about things like that ... this was the South but I never experienced it. And that was the first time that the realization hit me that this was a different world. That these were different people. I [had] never seen anything like them. It was unreal. Absolutely unreal.”<sup>13</sup> Robinson struggled to comprehend how a group of people could possess such rage and contempt toward another group because of their skin color. However, he did not feel the same contempt that whites felt against him, Robinson believed, “If anybody should have that feeling, that attitude, I should have it against them.”<sup>14</sup>

Traveling with a large group of black Marine recruits, Charles Davenport, who responded aggressively toward southern racism recalled, “The first prejudice or discrimination that I suffered was at Rocky Mount [North Carolina]. From Washington, D.C., to Rocky Mount, we were all over the train with no assigned seats.” However, when Davenport arrived at Rocky Mount and went in to see the station manager—not fully aware that he had literally crossed cultural lines as the train moved south past the Mason-Dixon Line—he said, “Hey buddy, I have to get my ticket straightened out,” and the station manager replied, “Who are you talking to, calling me buddy?” Davenport was not accustomed to this type of response. After a short argument, he found himself surrounded by the city police. Davenport explained that the station manager refused to amend his ticket and told the police, “You have no jurisdiction over me, because I’m a

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<sup>13</sup> Robinson interview.

<sup>14</sup> Robinson quoted in McLaurin, *Marines of Montford Point*, 90.

United States Marine.”<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the Army’s Military Police (MP) arrived at the train station, verified Davenport’s orders, and those of the other eighty-five blacks in his group, and ordered the station manager to amend the tickets. Despite the verification of government orders by the MPs and being a U.S. Marine recruit, as Davenport and the others boarded the train to Wilmington, North Carolina, they were told to continue to the rear of the train.

Norman Payne grew up on the south side of Chicago, Illinois, and enlisted in 1944. He remembered his experience in the Marines as a time of personal stress and confusion. Payne felt that he maintained a negative perspective and attitude during his tour as a Marine. He recalled, “Not because of anything the Corps had done to me, but I think I became defiant after my parents died ... I don’t mean in the sense of hating the world, but I think in terms of fighting against a lot of things I didn’t understand. So I went into the service, I had never been to the South before, and when I came through on the training there they put the black Marines on one side, and the white Marines on the other side [of the camp].”<sup>16</sup>

Payne asserted that his time in the South was unlike anything he had experienced in the North. Payne recalled: “Everything was new to me, not only new, but totally

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<sup>15</sup> Davenport interview; Davenport also quoted in McLaurin, *Marines of Montford Point*, 40–41. In 1940, Rocky Mount, NC was a substantial city in the South with a population of 25,568. See United States Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940 Population I*, Chapter 7, 1940, 772, <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1940.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Private Norman R. Payne served with the 52nd Defense Battalion on the Marshall Islands during World War II. See Norman R. Payne, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, July 14, 2004, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Payne\\_Norman.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Payne_Norman.html) (hereafter cited as Payne interview); Payne also quoted in McLaurin, *Marines of Montford Point*, 32–33, 189.

strange. I think the hardest adjustment I had to make in North Carolina was black people. I never knew at that time that I didn't know anything about [southern] black people. I didn't. I was involved in this incident where two white [men] were in front of me, and two black women coming from the opposite direction, and when they stopped, the white [men] said, 'Now don't you black bitches know you're supposed to get off the sidewalk when a white man passes?' So I said, 'what did you say?' And he said, 'Nigger, I wasn't talking to you.' I hit him, and I knocked the hell out of him."<sup>17</sup>

Not surprisingly, Payne had an encounter with the local authorities: "The next thing I know, the sheriff was there and the townspeople, they took me to a little area and one fella said, 'I told you, this must be one of them fellas from up north, 'cause they ain't had the education that they supposed to be having.'"<sup>18</sup> The white North Carolinian's statement rang through Payne's ears like nothing he had ever heard before. After being asked "boy, where are you from?" Payne described what immediately transpired: "I said I'm not a boy." The man then pulled his pistol and pressed it to Payne's head and said, "Boy, I'm gonna ask you one damn time, boy, where you from?" Payne said, "Chicago." Immediately one of the men responded, "I told you. I told you that boy wasn't educated. He never been educated as to what he supposed to be doing. Well nigger, I'm gonna give you one more chance, if I ever catch you again, I'm gonna blow your damn brains out, you got that boy?"<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Payne interview.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Payne understood that this situation had escalated beyond his control and acknowledged his failure to understand life in the South while on liberty. Notwithstanding, he believed he would return to the black southern community as a hero. Much to his surprise, the members of the community were not pleased. Their response to Payne's so-called heroic deed was one of, "Why did you come down here causing trouble?" This particular experience shook Payne to his core, affecting him in such a way to question his personal knowledge of his own people: "I didn't understand at the time, but the fact was that northern blacks were more defiant than the southern blacks, so consequently, what went on the agenda was that I was gonna get taught a lesson, made an example of, so I wouldn't do the same thing again. I couldn't piece all this together, at one time. This rolled around in my mind; the first thing that hit my mind was that I didn't know anything about my own people."<sup>20</sup> Growing up in the North, Payne, along with most northern blacks, was accustomed to interacting with whites in public establishments. The experiences of Davenport, Payne, and Robinson illustrate that northern blacks neither understood the full ramifications of their decision to join the Marine Corps nor the difficulties they would inevitably encounter in the American South.

Gene Doughty from New York City joined the Corps in 1943. Doughty discovered that the Marine Corps was accepting African Americans through the National Urban League of New York City. Doughty stated, "The Urban League was instrumental, along with FDR and Eleanor Roosevelt, and a few others. In helping the President of the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

United States, then FDR, to establish Executive Order 8802. And that's where I [came to] understand that [the Marines] were recruiting, that they were out to recruit a few good black men."<sup>21</sup>

During the first years of the war, according to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a “boom period” ignited a surge in black political activism.<sup>22</sup> A. Philip Randolph’s threat to launch a massive march on Washington in 1941—supported by organizations such as the small, pacifist-leaning Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)—contributed to the timing of President Roosevelt’s issuing of Executive Order 8802. In the judgment of political scientist Ronald R. Krebs, additionally, African Americans were inspired by President Roosevelt’s staunch rhetoric opposing “Hitlerism,” which invoked parallels between racism at home and Nazism abroad.<sup>23</sup> When discussing the march on Washington and its

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<sup>21</sup> Sergeant Gene Doughty, born in Stamford, Connecticut, moved to New York City, where he finished high school and entered City College. He joined the Corps in 1943 and participated in the invasion of Iwo Jima, Japan. Sergeant Doughty was discharged from the Marines in 1946. See Gene Doughty, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, June 29, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Doughty\\_Gene.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Doughty_Gene.html) (hereafter cited as Doughty interview). During the 1940s, as it is today, the National Urban League’s main office was located New York City. See A. Russell Buchanan, *Black Americans in World War II* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1977), 4–5, 16–17; see also *New York Times*, “President Orders an Even Break For Minorities in Defense Jobs,” June 26, 1941.

<sup>22</sup> Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Board Meeting Minutes, 8 May 1944, NAACP Papers, pt. 1, reel 3 [University Publications of America microfilm collection]. Group II, Series A, General Office File. Part 15: Segregation and Discrimination, Complaints and Responses, 1940–1955; Series B: Administrative Files (Washington, D.C.: Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress).

<sup>23</sup> Ronald R. Krebs, *Fighting for Rights: Military Service and the Politics of Citizenship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 151, 244n27; Buchanan, *Black Americans in World War II*, 21–27; Bernard C. Nalty, *The Right to Fight: African American Marines in World*

overall purpose, the *Chicago Defender*'s National Negro Defense Program included similar points, arguing that "Negroes CAN and MUST profit from the discipline that war will impose on all American citizens and BEGIN NOW under a planned program to secure all of the things which have previously been denied"<sup>24</sup>

The national press's efforts in circulating information concerning the Marine Corps's change in policy to admit African Americans was less enthusiastic than the northern black press. Regardless, on December 2, 1942, the *New York Times* released an article entitled "Recruiting Goes on for Negro Marines," stating: "The Negro Marines already enlisted are undergoing regular training at the New River, NC post. They are commanded by Colonel Samuel Woods, a white officer. They have their own barracks, chapel and other facilities and operate as a separate Negro unit. They are being trained as combat soldiers and will be fully equipped in all arms from machine guns to tanks. The Marine Corps was opened to enlistment by Negroes in April, and the battalion now being formed is the first in the history of the Corps."<sup>25</sup> To this point it is unclear whether or not the circulation of the *New York Times* article "Recruiting Goes on for Negro Marines" reached northern African Americans prior to their enlistments, or if any had read articles pertaining to the Marine Corps's recruitment of blacks. One could assert

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*War II* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1994), 1–2; "Roosevelt Opposed to March on Washington," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 28, 1941; Neil A. Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2010), 102–105.

<sup>24</sup> "Ask Scope Of Defense Bias Probe," *Chicago Defender*, July 19, 1941; "Davis Finally Replies To Request For A Negro On War Labor Board," *Chicago Defender*, March 28, 1942. See also Neil A. Wynn, *The Afro American and the Second World War* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1975), 101.

<sup>25</sup> "Recruiting Goes on for Negro Marines," *New York Times*, December 2, 1942.

that this article might have been overshadowed by the Navy Department's press release on May 20, 1942 announcing similar news of the Corps's recruiting efforts.

Claude A. Barnett, founder of the Associated Negro Press, argued that the presence of hundreds of thousands African Americans in the U.S. Armed Forces created a situation in which news of their military service was of prime importance. "How are blacks fairing? Are they receiving proper treatment? And are they conducting themselves with glory on the field of battle?" were prime questions that needed to be answered for African Americans during the war. Barnett further argued that although white newspaper coverage of the African American soldier and sailor was better than it was during World War I, blacks needed to depend mainly upon the black press for news.<sup>26</sup>

When asked if he was aware that prior to 1942 the Marine Corps had never admitted blacks, Archibald Mosely, who also joined the Marines in 1943, replied, "In 1942, Franklin Delano Roosevelt offered a decree that entitled blacks to be anywhere in any of the armed forces."<sup>27</sup> Thus far it is clear that the Navy Department's May 20, 1942 press release reached more northern African Americans at a faster rate than published newspaper articles after this date. One reason for this is that the Navy Department's press release for plans to recruit Negroes in the USMC went out to newspapers and radio

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<sup>26</sup> Claude A. Barnett, "The Role of the Press, Radio, and Motion Picture and Negro Morale," *Journal of Negro Education* 12 (Summer 1943): 478.

<sup>27</sup> Corporal Mosely was born in Carbondale, Illinois; he served in Guam and participated in the invasion of Iwo Jima, Japan, and the occupation of Japan. Mosely left the Corps after the war. See Archibald Mosely, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, December 17, 2004, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Mosely\\_Archibald.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Mosely_Archibald.html) (hereafter cited as Archibald interview); see also McLaurin, *Marines of Montford Point*, 188.

stations for *immediate release*.<sup>28</sup> Information concerning Executive Order 8802 suggests that news only reached those who lived in New York, at this time, or was garnered through associates of family members that had subsequently returned home on military leave. The *Baltimore Afro-American* and the *Chicago Defender*, both released news that the Marine Corps opened its ranks for the admission of Negroes on May 30, 1942, ten days after the Navy Department's press release.<sup>29</sup>

After the war began in Europe, and well before the United States's entrance into the conflict, the *Pittsburgh Courier* made every effort to publicize the federal government's lack of fair play for blacks in the armed forces. On September 23, 1939, the *Pittsburgh Courier* exclaimed, "Before any of our people get unduly excited about SAVING DEMOCRACY in Europe, it should be called to their attention that we have NOT YET ACHIEVED DEMOCRACY HERE. We cannot save what DOES NOT EXIST. Despite REPEATED REPEALS, the government has made no move to LOWER the COLOR BAR in the Army or Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard or the Merchant Marines, yet it moves Heaven and Earth to help preserve democracy ABROAD." For nearly two years the *Pittsburgh Courier* called for an *equal and full democratic* nation to abandon its discriminatory and segregationist practices, and on May 16, 1942 the *Pittsburgh Courier* challenged the federal government and the nation by asking a simple

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<sup>28</sup> Department of the Navy, "Marines Announce Plans for Recruiting African-Americans," Department of the Navy, May 20, 1942, Record Group 428: General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1941–2004 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration). See also Appendix B; Ronald K. Culp, *The First Black United States Marines: The Men of Montford Point, 1942–1946* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007), 29.

<sup>29</sup> "Navy, Marines Begin Recruiting June 1," *Chicago Defender*, May 30, 1942; "Sailors and Marines to Enlist June 1," *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 30, 1942.



question: “Why Not Now?”<sup>30</sup>

Despite the black press’s best efforts (including the “Double V” Campaign, a World War II era effort of black Americans to gain a victory over racism at home as well as victory abroad that swept across the United States from coast to coast), the news announcing the admission of African Americans to join the ranks of the USMC failed to reach local communities, both black and white, as rapidly as anticipated.<sup>31</sup> Many Americans learned of the existence of black Marines when they saw them in uniform for the first time, at home and abroad. Others discovered that blacks were serving in the Marine Corps after arriving at induction centers with the expectation of entering the Army or the Navy.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “Democracy At Home,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 23, 1939; “Why Not Now?” *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 16, 1942; “Why Our Slogan Is ‘Double V’,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 8, 1942; *Pittsburgh Courier*, “Courier’s ‘Double VV’ Sweeps America from Coast To Coast ... Thousands Sanction War Slogan!” February 28, 1942; *Pittsburgh Courier*, “Why Our Slogan Is ‘Double V’,” August 8, 1942. For more on the “Double V Campaign,” see Michael L. Cooper, *The Double V Campaign: African Americans and World War II* (New York: Lodestar Books, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> The Double Victory Campaign was not so much an event, but rather used more as a motivational tool by African Americans during the time of World War II. In response to the United States entering war in 1941, James G. Thompson wrote a letter to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, expressing his concerns about discrimination in the military and in general towards African Americans in the United States. The idea he proposed in this article was to start a movement for two causes. Not just so blacks could fight and participate in the war, but also in everyday society, as equal citizens. He proposed that providing freedom for blacks was not such a high price to pay if they were sacrificing their lives every day in support of the Allied effort. The Double Victory Campaign became another marker in American history in which blacks took another step toward complete emancipation. See *Pittsburgh Courier*, “Readers Want Double ‘V’ Made Into Pins, Emblems, February 21, 1942.

<sup>32</sup> Culp, *First Black United States Marines*, 30. In 1943, the *Pittsburgh Courier* had a circulation mark of nearly 300,000 and the *Baltimore Afro-American* neared the mark of

Doughty, who responded passively to the southern system of Jim Crow explained his introduction to the South: “Traveling to North Carolina was another ballgame. When I saw signs barring blacks from entering certain stores, certain sectors of town, I realized, hey, this does exist in the South. Especially when it comes to bathrooms, things of that nature. We were denied from certain cafes, where one could eat and couldn’t eat, and had to resort to other places. Some places, you didn’t have at all. There were no openings, or no boarding houses, no restaurants or eateries. And just by good faith, we were able to meet people in town, black people in town who accepted us and provided us with a good meal. And that’s how I existed until I got into Montford Point Camp.”<sup>33</sup>

Doughty further explained, “As a nineteen-year-old, the sensitivity [to southern culture] really was not instilled. That is to say, I heard about. I guess maybe this is what I have to cope with. As a nineteen-year-old coping with something, well, that’s a little far-fetched there, because you really would expect more anger than anything else there. But I resorted to a calm view, a calm rapport. I accepted life as it was. Whether I was in North Carolina or New York.”<sup>34</sup>

Lawrence Diggs, a nineteen-year-old draftee from Chicago, Illinois, challenged southern Jim Crow laws. In 1943, while on liberty in Jacksonville, and in uniform (which offered scant protection against racial epithets and physical assault) Diggs described an incident in which he and several black Marines boarded a bus and asked a

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200,000. See Barnett, “The Role of the Press, Radio, and Motion Picture and Negro Morale,” 478.

<sup>33</sup> Doughty interview.

<sup>34</sup> McLaurin, *Marines of Montford Point*, 41–42.

white male passenger to move from the rear to the front of the bus, "... you started at the in the back of the bus, they [white passengers], if they had most of the seats, and you started in the back and you get up to where the whites were sitting, you were not supposed to sit forward in front of them." Diggs believed that the white passengers that would not move toward the front of the bus were purposely acting defiant because they wanted the police to arrest blacks. He further described what happened after asking the passenger to move forward on the bus: "... there was about six or seven Marines on the back there and they just moved him [the white person], just picked him up and took him on up front ... where we'd have some seats." Diggs and other black Marines believed that there was safety and strength in numbers, especially when dealing with the police and public transportation, stating that "... the police sometimes, he'd raise a lot of hell, but I don't think he took anybody off the bus. 'Cause if he took the sergeant [who was with us], he had to take eight more Marines with him; he wasn't gonna go alone. So, that was that."<sup>35</sup>

George Taylor, also a Chicago native, was drafted in 1943.<sup>36</sup> Taylor was initially drafted to serve in the Army, but when he requested to serve in the cavalry the recruiter told him: "You can't get in the Cavalry because the Cavalry's being cut out." When,

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<sup>35</sup> Corporal Lawrence Diggs, originally from the delta country of Mississippi, moved to Chicago as a young man. Diggs was drafted in 1943, and served with the 7th Ammunition Company, in support of the First Marine Division, during the Peleliu campaign. See McLaurin, *Marines of Montford Point*, 83, 185.

<sup>36</sup> Private George Taylor, an Indianapolis native, grew up in Chicago. After enrolling into the Marines, he was assigned to the 51st Defense Battalion and stationed at the Marshall Islands. See George Taylor, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, June 29, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Taylor\\_George.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Taylor_George.html) (hereafter cited as Taylor interview).

despite the recruiter's response, Taylor pressed the recruiter on the issue to serve in the Cavalry, he was then informed that he was going to be sent to the Navy. Taylor continued with his insubordination, and after adamantly refusing to enlist in the Navy, an army lieutenant finally had to intervene. Taylor recalled: "[He] looks at me, he looks at the paper. I said, 'you don't have to give me the double look. I'm the same guy you looked at when you came out of that back room there.' I says, 'and I'm not going in the Navy.' And then he said, 'what about the Marines?'"<sup>37</sup> Left to choose between the Navy and the Marine Corps, he opted for the Marines, unaware of the Corps's racist history. At this time, Taylor may have known that the Navy was recruiting blacks to serve exclusively in the steward's branch, a fact that could have attributed to Taylor's insubordination, and his willingness to enter the Marines without considering the ramifications of his decision.

Upon arriving in Washington, D.C., Taylor believed that he would continue to ride in regular coach with all the other passengers and receive the same treatment on the train as he did from Chicago to Washington. After detraining in the nation's capitol, Taylor recalled his poignant introduction to the South: "Got to Washington, D.C., they put us in a little straw coach. Little straw [seat] backs. Wasn't nothing in there. And I got to fussing about it. Because of what our [military orders] said. And this old lady said, son, you've crossed the Mason Dixon line, now. I said, that don't mean nothing. I'm with the government. She said, that don't mean a thing down here."<sup>38</sup> Taylor quickly discovered that the power of southern Jim Crow laws eclipsed that of the U.S.

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<sup>37</sup> Taylor interview.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Government. When discussing other encounters with prejudice after arriving in Jacksonville, North Carolina, Taylor recalled, “I couldn’t even get a hamburger in town, no place. You couldn’t, it was horrible down there. And so, I, being a northern boy, it was hard for me to accept a lot of that down South.”<sup>39</sup>

Taylor expressed that growing up on the streets of west side Chicago was his way of life. On the west side of Chicago, there was no “all-black” neighborhood, whites and blacks lived in the same communities; black and white Chicagoans considered the south side of Chicago to be all black, but whites worked in south side Chicago and interacted with blacks without fear of prejudice. According to Taylor, his experiences as a Chicago native helped develop his accommodation skills in a racially interactive framework, which naturally was a direct affront to the southern system of Jim Crow. Taylor’s aggressive responses that challenged and opposed the rules of segregation and discrimination in the South were directly linked to his northern model of socialization.<sup>40</sup>

Several northern black Marine enlistees approached traveling to the South as if it were another trip, without a second thought. Notwithstanding, their eyes were quickly opened to the racial customs of the South. For example, Averet Corley from Indianapolis, Indiana, who was drafted in 1945, shared his perceptions of the South before arriving in North Carolina and his first encounter with southern culture: “I hadn’t thought of that aspect [segregation] of it, but yes. Being young, this [was] all new to me. And being from the North I hadn’t dealt with the South at all. I knew nothing about segregation. When we got to the bus station at Jacksonville they had signs. *Colored and*

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

*White*. And the colored section was around to the back and the water fountains and things you couldn't use, the general toilets and things that they had colored toilets. And I looked and I couldn't understand that, you know. And being young, I said, well maybe that's just the custom, I don't know."<sup>41</sup>

After arriving at Montford Point and attempting to go on liberty in Jacksonville, Corley described that blacks Marines were not readily welcomed in town: "Going downtown you can forget that because people would not accept you downtown. It was the law of the land back then." When black Marines went into Jacksonville, even if only passing through to go elsewhere, they found that many of the residents openly expressed their racist feelings toward them. There were exceptions, few and far between, when some whites treated black Marines fairly and with the respect due to any man. Corley further described that this lack of acceptance embarrassed many of the white Marines specifically when it came to riding the buses, "I can remember on the buses going on liberty ... if the bus was full ... and a white Marine didn't have any place to sit, [the driver] would tell the black Marines to get off the bus and give him your seat. It was overt prejudice. I couldn't understand that. And a lot of the times it embarrassed the white Marines 'cause a lot [of] old guys couldn't understand it either. You know. But

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<sup>41</sup> Corporal Averet Corley, born in Indianapolis, Indiana, entered the USMC in 1945 and was recalled for a tour of duty during the Korean War, but served at Montford Point. He left the Marine Corps in 1951. See Averet Corley, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, July 23, 2004, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Corley\\_Averet.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Corley_Averet.html) (hereafter cited as Corley interview).

that was the custom of segregation [it] was the law of the land back then. And you just dealt with it. If you rebelled, you're going to get in trouble now."<sup>42</sup>

Some Marines tried to avoid trouble and run-ins with the local law enforcement and white residents of Jacksonville and surrounding communities. For example, Corley traveled north in order to minimize encounters with southern prejudice. "[When] I took liberty I made sure I could go as far north which would be on a 72 hours pass, to Washington or somewhere where I won't be bothered ... but Washington wasn't all that great either, at that time. But I dealt with it."<sup>43</sup> Corley's desire to be a Marine outweighed challenging southern Jim Crow laws; he was very young, 18 years old, and could ill afford to ruin an opportunity to serve his nation during a time of war. Lawrence Diggs also described what he would do to avoid trouble while traveling through different southern towns such as New Bern and Durham, North Carolina: "We'd sleep in the cemetery at night. Whether you know it or not, nobody's coming out in the cemetery. I mean, [white] people just don't come out there. So we knew that and, we'd just, five, six guys just take them big overcoats, go out there and lay them down and lay on them."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Corley interview; Culp, *First Black United States Marines*, 65. In 1940, Onslow County, NC, in which Jacksonville is located, contained a population of 17,939. In 1940, the population of Jacksonville proper was 873. These population figures during the 1940s illustrate that northern black Marines from cities such as Chicago (pop. 3,396,808), New York City (pop. 7,457,995), and Pittsburgh (pop. 671,659) had to deal with a significant shift from dense urban population centers to sparse rural communities. Chicago, New York City, and Pittsburgh averaged 18,086 people per square mile in 1940. See *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940 Population I*, 766–783; *U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1940*, Table 17, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab17.txt>.

<sup>43</sup> Corley interview.

<sup>44</sup> McLaurin, *Marines of Montford Point*, 83–84.

David Dinkins from Trenton, New Jersey, who was also drafted in 1945, responded passively to the southern system of Jim Crow. He had never traveled to the South prior to entering the Corps and was fully aware that the Marine Corps was accepting blacks. Similar to Corley, Dinkins traveled as far north as possible during liberty, “They used to give 62 hours passes, not 72, 62. So when you got [a] 62, we tried to come home. Tried to [travel] as far north as Trenton or New York.”<sup>45</sup> Dinkins was 18 years old when he was drafted and shared the same views as Corley with regard to accepting the call to join the military. According to Dinkins, everybody went to war that was drafted; the thought of not going to fight never entered one’s mind back then. He wanted to be a Marine and “... figured [the] way to stay alive [was] to be well trained. Well, and the way to be well trained [was] to be a Marine.” When discussing his appreciation about being a Montford Point Marine, Dinkins admitted, “I didn’t really fully appreciate [it], until I [enlisted and learned] that there had been no blacks in the Marine Corps prior to ’42.”<sup>46</sup>

From 1942 through 1945, the racial discrimination northern black Marines experienced in the South was unparalleled to that in the North. Segregation reflected the

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<sup>45</sup> Private David Dinkins was born in Trenton, New Jersey, where he finished high school. He enrolled in the Marine Corps in 1945, and after stateside duty was discharged the following year. He completed a degree in mathematics at Howard University in 1950, a law degree from the Brooklyn School of Law in 1956, and practiced law in New York City until 1975. Politically active, he became president of the New York City Board of Elections in 1975 and in 1989 was elected mayor of New York City. Rudy Giuliani defeated him in a 1993 bid for re-election. See David Dinkins, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, July 21, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Dinkins\\_David.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Dinkins_David.html) (hereafter cited as Dinkins interview).

<sup>46</sup> Dinkins interview.



racial attitudes and beliefs of the majority of the nation's white population; however, the aggressive nature of racism in the South produced a caustic atmosphere that was felt as soon as one crossed the Mason-Dixon Line. Unlike in the North, vigilante justice was *always* a potential result for any violation of the South's Jim Crow laws.

While several of these men passively expressed dissatisfaction with the southern system of Jim Crow and others aggressively opposed it, all of these men, by necessity, accommodated and submitted to the South's legal system of discrimination. Each of these northern blacks' responses varied as they entered the Marine Corps at different times during the war, as well as their tolerance for racial discrimination. Yet, Jim Crow revealed to these men a shocking new reality as they transitioned to life south of the Mason-Dixon Line: There was a fundamental difference between racism in the North as opposed to that in the South. Knowing one's place in white society was the safest route in negotiating Jim Crow. Nevertheless, based on their domestic and geographical background, each northern black Marines had developed a specific accommodating skill set and predictable manner in which they behaved toward and responded to segregation and racial discrimination.

The southern cultural encounters these northern black Marines faced were inescapable; the harsh reality of life in the South presented few options: *fight, flight, or submit*. The common thread between these northern black Marines was the abrupt mental shift each of them had to make while living in North Carolina and traveling throughout the South. There was no complexity or uncertainty regarding racial practices in the South; no longer was there any flexibility in the appearance and execution of Jim

Crow, which made immersion into the South's strict racial environment debilitating. Furthermore, each Marine had to decide whether to accept or challenge the established and inflexible segregationist policies of the American South.

## CHAPTER III

## FILLING THE CORPS'S RANKS AND COPING WITH JIM CROW IN AMERICA

On December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked the United States, *all* Americans reacted with anger and shock; however, at the time, the level of national cohesion and support for Allied efforts was modest.<sup>1</sup> With the United States committed to the war effort, those in charge of the conduct of war quickly recognized that the fabric of the nation needed to be mended and strengthened; that is, that *every* American (including blacks) needed to be persuaded to understand and clearly see the righteousness of the nation's cause. Furthermore, average Americans had to accept the Allied cause as their own personal mission and devote their energies to the war effort at home and abroad.<sup>2</sup>

The nation's "call to arms" to Americans meant filling the ranks of its armed forces. This action forced senior U.S. leadership to seriously consider the results of this call to arms as they tugged on the heartstrings of the average American; moreover, blacks were included among average Americans. Percival L. Prattis, a news correspondent for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, concluded that the African American "had been subjected to, and been the victim of, the same peace-and comfort-loving process as

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<sup>1</sup> George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935–1971*, Vol. 1, 1935–1938 (New York: Random House, 1972), 257–313; Hadley Cantril, *Gauging Public Opinion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1944), 23–65; David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 163–170, 218–248, 287, 319–322, 337–362, 363–381, 399–409, 434, 465–480.

<sup>2</sup> Percival L. Prattis, "The Morale of the Negro in the Armed Services of the United States," *Journal of Negro Education* 12 (Summer 1943): 356.

the white American. He was not any more ready to give up his fireside and his life than his fellow white American. Nor was he less ready as a result of the influence of general social action upon him. He was not interested in war. He had no hankering for it. He hated to think of the fact that war had come and that it would make stern demands upon him. Just like the white American, he waited for the demand to come to him. He was not bubbling over with morale.”<sup>3</sup>

Prior to December 7, 1941, the economic, political and social status of most African Americans in the United States was demoralizing. The Great Depression had wreaked complete havoc on black Americans, especially in the southern states. South of the Mason-Dixon Line, “blacks were typically the victims of some of the most unusual atrocities and hardships.” Yet, many African Americans “wisely chose to fight for the right to fight and work.” During the World War II era, most blacks acknowledged that this was the opportunity to securely stake their claim for equality and the rights of first-class citizenship.<sup>4</sup>

From an early age, young African American Marine draftees and volunteers from the South had been taught the written and unwritten laws of Jim Crow. For these men, living in the South did not present unusual circumstances or situations; they understood all too well the rules of segregation and racial discrimination. Southern black Marine

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 356–357.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 357; see also Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 18–19; John Hope Franklin, “Their War and Mine,” *Journal of American History* 77 (September 1990): 576–579; “The Negroes’ Role in the War: A Study of White and Colored Opinions (1943)” in Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces: Basic Documents V*, Black Soldiers in World War II (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1977), 187–244.

enlistees who traveled to North Carolina from locations such as Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., knew, almost instinctively, the consequences of challenging the southern system of Jim Crow. For some, entering the Marines meant employment, while others viewed it as an opportunity to earn a measure of respect and curtail the demands of segregation and discrimination. However, racial bigotry displaced their notions of patriotism and spirit of volunteerism. Historian Melton A. McLaurin asserts that, “Even in the service of their country, at every turn they encountered all the usual demeaning social requirements and expectations of the segregated society in which they lived.”<sup>5</sup>

Bearing in mind that southern black Marine recruits coped with racial prejudice and discrimination at different times during World War II, each of them understood the culture of the South and responded accordingly; furthermore, the customs of the South were less foreign to them as opposed to their northern black counterparts. Nevertheless, what underscored the struggles these men endured centered on adjusting to life in the USMC, officially donning the Marine Corps uniform for the *first time in history*, asserting themselves as men in a skeptical southern society, and dealing with northern blacks whose accommodation skills were a direct affront to the southern way of life.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Melton A. McLaurin, *The Marines of Montford Point: America's First Black Marines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 36.

<sup>6</sup> In this chapter, the wording and quotations of Anthony Caputo (1941), Al Banker (1942), Joseph Myers (1942), Turner Blount (1943), Ruben Hines (drafted in 1943), Joseph Carpenter (1943), Herman Darden (drafted in 1943), William Foreman (drafted in 1943), Howard Williams (drafted in 1943), George Taylor (drafted in 1943), Ellis Cunningham (1944), Roland Durden (1944), Fred Ash (drafted in 1945), Averet Corley (drafted in 1945), David Dinkins (drafted in 1945), Henry McNair (1945), and Glenn White (drafted in 1945) are unaltered from the original

In contrast to Chapter II, this chapter will examine the various ways in which southern black Marine recruits coped with *official* Jim Crow laws. It will explore the realities that black and white American society created about all African American Marines and their wartime service, and briefly discuss how northern and southern black enlistees engaged and interacted within a segregationist Marine Corps. This chapter will also emphasize the significance of the draft, and explain how the Marine Corps manipulated the Selective Service in order to protect what senior officers considered its elitist image based, in part, on limiting its membership to white volunteers. Throughout the course of World War II, and by the actions of these African American Marines, initial racial opinions shifted and a new tradition of Marine Corps service began.<sup>7</sup>

Faced with the prospect of officially enlisting blacks into the USMC for the first time, white officers such as Colonel Ray A. Robinson, a staff officer at Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC), met with the director of the Selective Service, Brigadier General Lewis Blaine Hershey, to discuss the Marine Corps's concerns. Robinson also met with Lieutenant Colonel Campbell C. Johnson, an African American army officer, and said: "Eleanor [Roosevelt] says we gotta take in Negroes, and we are just scared to death; we've never had any in; we don't know how to handle them; we are afraid of them." Johnson replied, "I'll do my best to help you get good ones. I'll get the word

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with the exception of a few grammatical changes for clarity. Each of these men entered the Marine Corps from 1941 through 1945 respectively. This sample of published/recorded interviews used throughout this thesis are small (approximately 22), however, it is representative of the African Americans who entered the Marine Corps as volunteers and draftees during this period. These interviews are from the archives at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington.

<sup>7</sup> Craig M. Cameron, *American Samurai: Myth, Imagination, and the Conduct of Battle in the First Marine Division, 1941–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 61.

around that if you want to die young, join the Marines. So anybody that joins has got to be pretty good!’ And it was the truth. We got some awfully good Negroes.”<sup>8</sup> Until 1942, the sacredness and sanctity of the Marine Corps was established on a white familial base of service to Corps and country. The advent of the African American Marine fractured the path of traditional service, which at the time was colossal; it disrupted the harmony of Marine Corps tradition, threatening not only the entire culture of the Marine Corps but also the American South.

This new adjustment was not easy for either the Marine Corps or for its new black recruits, most of whom did their best to avoid trouble. Drafted in 1943, William Foreman, from Catonsville, Maryland, stated, “I don’t think the white Marines were accustomed to blacks being in their uniform and [there were] some scuffles there. However, I never got into one, fortunately, but I know there was resentment. I hate to say this, but some of them were resentful of us being in their uniform because it was something that they hadn’t experienced. And you can’t really blame them for that because if there’s something that you hold onto dearly and then there’s somebody that’s going to infiltrate that, you have to get used to those people before you come around on

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<sup>8</sup> General Ray A. Robinson, USMC (Ret.), interview dated March 18–19, 1968 (Washington, D.C.: Oral History Collection, Marine Corps History Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1968), 136; Robinson quoted in Henry I. Shaw, Jr. and Ralph W. Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 1975), 1–2; Robinson quoted in Ronald K. Culp, *The First Black United States Marines: The Men of Montford Point, 1942–1946* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007), 30. See also George Q. Flynn, *Lewis B. Hershey, Mr. Selective Service* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 94, 118–126; George Q. Flynn, *The Draft, 1940–1973* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993), 42–44.

board there.”<sup>9</sup>

The national and black presses quickly spread the news of the Marine Corps’s new enlistment policy but it took time for the message to take effect among readers, and what was expected to produce a flood of black enlistees became a slow trickle. From May through August of 1942, a prominent black newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, ran an article a month announcing that the Marine Corps was accepting African Americans for service. On August 20, 1942, three months to the day after the Navy Department’s press release that the USMC begin recruiting blacks, the *Pittsburgh Courier* ran “Marines Have 542 Enlistees.” According to the article, these numbers indicated that the Marine Corps was enlisting, on average, 180 blacks a month: “These volunteers have been placed in an inactive duty status until the first battalion of Negroes, numbering about 900, has been recruited.”<sup>10</sup> This was far below the Marine Corps’s goal of enlisting 1,000 African Americans per month; moreover, this speaks to the recruiting climate at the time for blacks: No extensive tradition of military service and lack of substantive recruiting efforts in black communities.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Private William Irvin Foreman was a member of the Special Weapons Group of the 51st Defense Battalion. He was stationed in Hawaii for the duration of World War II and discharged after the war. See William Foreman, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, August 11, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Foreman\\_William.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Foreman_William.html) (hereafter cited as Foreman interview).

<sup>10</sup> “Marines Have 542 Enlistees,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 22, 1942. By 1943, the *Pittsburgh Courier* had a circulation mark of nearly 300,000 nationwide, making it one of the most widely distributed black newspapers of its era.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard C. Nalty, *The Right to Fight: African-American Marines in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1994), 2.



The absence of traditional service as Marines did not prevent these men from seeking opportunities to prove their loyalty and patriotism and to extinguish segregation and racial discrimination in the United States. For example, Al Banker from New Orleans, Louisiana, volunteered to serve in the Marines because he believed "... that this was history in the making," and wanted to be part of it.<sup>12</sup> Banker, who enlisted on July 16, 1942, was fully aware that the Marine Corps previously had never admitted African Americans. Banker learned that the Marine Corps was recruiting blacks from reading the *Pittsburgh Courier*: "I was reading a newspaper, ... [the] *Pittsburgh Courier*, and I read in the paper where some men had joined the Marine Corps. One of them happened to be my scoutmaster, he [Raymond Floyd] was also a member of my church." After this discovery, Banker informed his father of his decision to join the Marines and his father replied, "You can't join the Marine Corps, they don't have any Colored boys in the Marine Corps. I said, 'well they do now.' Well how do you know? I said, 'well, here it is in the paper. Mr. Floyd just joined.'"<sup>13</sup>

Banker's father, like most Americans, had never heard of or seen a black Marine. Banker's father continued in his sermonical tone about the Marines stating: "You know you can't make it in the Marine Corps. Look at you, you're skinny and everything, you know the Marines fight on land, sea and in the air?"<sup>14</sup> Similarly convinced like much of

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<sup>12</sup> Master Sergeant Al Banker, a career Marine, served with the occupation forces on Saipan during the war. See Al Banker, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, June 29, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Banker\\_Al.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Banker_Al.html) (hereafter cited as Banker interview).

<sup>13</sup> Banker interview.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

the American public, Banker's father believed the Marines to be the roughest and toughest service in the military. This storybook image of the Marines before World War II—which continues into the twenty-first century—gained prominence after the Battle of Belleau Wood (1918), where the Marines fought ferociously against the Germans during World War I.<sup>15</sup> Drafted in 1943, Herman Darden from Washington, D.C., also knew of the fighting reputation of the Marines: “The reputation of the Marines was known to be rough and ready, and my mother asked me ‘why?’ I said, well, they’re supposed to be first in battle, and first back home, so I don’t want to stay out too long.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> General Böhm, commander of the German 28th Division, was so impressed by the Marines’ bellicosity and tactics that twenty-four years later, on Guadalcanal, a Japanese general would almost echo the exact same sentiments: “It is a question of the possession or nonpossession of this or that village or woods, insignificant in itself; it is a question whether the Anglo American claim that the American Army is equal or even the superior of the German Army is to be made good.” The notion of battle as a test of cultural mettle and institutional reputations figured prominently and self-consciously in Marine Corps thinking from that time forward. This was a not a new idea in the annals of military organizations, but it marked for the USMC a rite of passage to maturity. A respected foe had granted recognition of the Marines’ institutional distinctiveness that perforce made them a representative of the United States, separate from the Army. Never before had the Marine Corps been so clearly set apart from other American soldiers, and to this day, Marines take great pride in the sobriquet “Devil Dogs” bestowed on them in their first major battle—the German translation of Devil Dog is “Teufelhunden.” See Cameron, *American Samurai*, 22, 22n2, 23, 23n4–23n7, 24, 24n8, 30–42, 43, 43n57, 45–48, 52–53, 59, 69, 88, 146–147, 260–261; Eugene B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1981), 12–14; Robert H. Leckie, *Helmet For My Pillow: From Parris Island to the Pacific* (New York: Bantam Books, 1957), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Corporal Herman Darden, Jr., served with the 51st Defense Battalion in the Ellice Islands and was discharged at the end of the war. See Herman Darden, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, July 23, 2004, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Darden\\_Herman.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Darden_Herman.html) (hereafter cited as Darden interview).

Despite Harden's knowledge of the Marines's fighting reputation, the image of white soldiers storming Normandy beach and white Marines conducting battle on the beaches and islands of the South Pacific would remain at the forefront of the white collective mind. The image of an African American donning Marine Corps green and the sacred Dress Blue uniform was unfathomable, and as such, did not quickly settle in the minds of white Americans as blacks joined in the Allied effort. Much like George Taylor's experience, Al Banker recalled an incident while traveling from Louisiana to North Carolina in which his government orders had no power over the deep-seated discrimination in the South: "We had Pullman service and dining car service. [The] first thing that really aggravated us on our trip to boot camp was we had government [orders]; we were traveling with government orders, assigned Pullman service and dining car service. We did not get Pullman service, although the government had authorized it."<sup>17</sup> Banker, accustomed to the South's treatment of blacks, nonetheless, was unsettled by the lack of respect shown to members of the U.S. Armed Forces. It amazed Banker how he and other Montford Pointers were treated compared to their white counterparts, "We wore the same uniform." However, they could not sit in the same theaters or go on liberty with them. "Overall it was a good experience and it was a hard thing to do."<sup>18</sup>

After finishing high school, Joseph Carpenter, a native of Washington D.C., joined the Marines in 1943. He described how he dealt with the constant prejudice as he traveled by train to North Carolina, "We were forced to sit behind the coal car. We wanted to eat while we were traveling on the train, so I asked the conductor, where could

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<sup>17</sup> Banker interview.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

we eat? And he says, ‘well, I’m sorry we don’t have nothing for you.’ So I said, well don’t you have a meal car around here? And he says, ‘yes, but you all can’t go there because that’s back in the white section.’”<sup>19</sup>

This would not be the last time that black Marines such as Banker and Carpenter would be insulted during their Marine Corps careers. African Americans wearing the Marine Corps uniform was such a major departure from an established tradition that it revealed the significant and far-reaching effects of the war. Banker described an incident that took place during a speech that Major General Henry L. Larsen gave at Montford Point in 1943: “In spite of the discrimination. We were insulted. Even the highest-ranking general in the Marine Corps [the Commander of Camp Lejeune, North Carolina] insulted us right to our face. And after he made his speech we applauded him. In his remarks he said, ‘I did not realize that a war was going on until I returned to the States. When I saw you people wearing our uniform. The globe and anchor. I seen dog Marines, women Marines, and you people.’ He [was referring] to [us] as, ‘you people.’ And, of course, the general, we had to respect him, we applauded him. That was a tough pill to swallow.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Carpenter served stateside as a clerk until 1946, when he was discharged. After receiving a college degree, he re-entered the Corps in 1956, obtained a commission and achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. See Joseph Carpenter, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, July 23, 2004, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Carpenter\\_Joseph.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Carpenter_Joseph.html) (hereafter cited as Carpenter interview).

<sup>20</sup> Banker interview. The phrase “you people” was frequently used by officers when addressing their white units, but in almost all instances, when addressing blacks, the choice to use “you” instead of “we” caused a mental and ideological division among black and white Marines. See Nalty, *Right to Fight*, 14.

Banker understood his place in society and knew how white America viewed him as a black man. He knew where to go, when to go, and how to conduct himself. Racial discrimination was routine, but it was the disrespect and insults that bothered Banker most—the feeling of being treated as less than a man. Nonetheless, Banker yielded to Jim Crow laws with regard to waiting rooms, places of entertainment, and transportation, “it was the law of the land and we went right along with it. Had no choice.”<sup>21</sup>

After hearing General Larsen’s comments, Turner Blount, from Keyville, Georgia, recalled, “From the top coming down, it wasn’t good for them to treat you like that, because the top, the whites, didn’t want you. We had people like [Edgar] Huff and [Gilbert] Johnson who said, ‘You can’t give up,’ so I just fell into that, you’re going to make it.” Blount further described how he coped with Jim Crow: “You wasn’t allowed to go to mainside [Camp Lejeune]. That’s off limits [only whites were allowed on mainside]. You go to downtown Jacksonville, there’s the railroad tracks, blacks over there and whites here, and [the] police and MPs there to keep whites from going over there and keep blacks from coming on [the other] side.”<sup>22</sup>

Fred Ash, a Mississippi native who was drafted in 1945, recalled that the segregation and racial discrimination he experienced had little effect on him. Ash

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<sup>21</sup> Banker interview.

<sup>22</sup> Master Sergeant Turner G. Blount joined the Corps in 1943. During World War II he participated in the invasions of Tinian, Saipan and Okinawa, Japan. He served with a motor transport unit based out of Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and Japan during the Korean War. He also saw combat in Vietnam, where he guarded a helicopter unit at Da Nang and retired shortly after the war. See Turner Blount, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, July 21, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Blount\\_Turner.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Blount_Turner.html) (hereafter cited as Blount interview); Blount also quoted in Culp, *First Black United States Marines*, 103.

believed the Marine Corps provided him with greater opportunities than life as a civilian: “I was so rejoiced over being a Marine [that segregation and discrimination] didn’t matter too much.” He understood the legal system of discrimination in the South, and described his feelings concerning the limited access afforded to black Marines on mainside: “I would rather [eat at Montford Point], ‘cause, when you would go over [to mainside], they’d look at you like you were something from outer space. And then there’d be times that we’d go in certain areas. You probably wouldn’t see the guy, but you could hear him, and they [white Marines] gave us the name, not us, but Camp Montford Point, Monkey Point.”<sup>23</sup>

White Marines used terms such as “monkey and “ape” to reinforce social inferiority among black Marines as well as to dehumanize them. Whites used this animal imagery to stereotype blacks as lazy, dim, and undisciplined. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, racist images and books relied heavily on the Negro-ape metaphor to justify violence against African Americans and other oppressed groups.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Master Sergeant Fred Ash was born on a Mississippi farm. He joined the Marine Corps in 1945 and made it his career. During World War II, Ash served with occupation forces in Saipan and Guam. During the Korean War he fought in both the Inchon and Chosin Reservoir campaigns and also served in Vietnam. He retired to live in Jacksonville, North Carolina, where he died in March 2005. See Fred Ash, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, December 17, 2004, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Ash\\_Fred.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Ash_Fred.html) (hereafter cited as Ash interview).

<sup>24</sup> Philip Atiba Goff, Jennifer L. Eberhardt, Melissa J. Williams, and Matthew Christian Jackson, “Not Yet Human: Implicit Knowledge, Historical Dehumanization, and Contemporary Consequences” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94 (April 2008): 292–306; see also George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), 256–282.

Despite limited choices and passively accepting the rules of segregation and racial discrimination, Banker shared an experience in which he and his fellow Marines, white and black, had reached a culminating point. While traveling by bus to Kinston, North Carolina, from Jacksonville, a white female passenger attempted to sit in the rear of the bus, which would cause all the blacks to stand behind her despite open seating in the front of the bus. The bus driver told one of the black Marines to give up his seat and he refused. The driver then, not pleased with the Marine's response, said a few words, went to the front of the bus and returned with a wrench as if he was going to hit the Marine. It was then that "a few white Marines on the bus warned the bus driver not to touch the Marine, they said, 'Don't put your hands on him.'"<sup>25</sup> Isolated incidents such as these are rare and did not evolve into an established practice or pattern behavior among black and white Marines throughout the war; however, solitary events of this kind inspired confidence in black Marines, knowing they could rely on white Marines to support them on occasion, lightening the burden of segregation and racial discrimination.

Even with the constant pressure of adhering to Jim Crow laws, the influence of movies depicting military men as heroes, greatly impressed African Americans. Several Montford Pointers drew inspiration from the big screen to join the Marines. The United States portrayed the Axis powers in such a manner that incited the general population for war. Average Americans, at home and abroad, were willing to do whatever was

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<sup>25</sup> Banker interview. This example is one of a limited sample, and does not speak to the overall interracial experience within the USMC during World War II—the distance from Jacksonville to Kinston is approximately 45 miles.

necessary to defeat the enemy.<sup>26</sup>

Joseph Myers, who entered the Marines in 1942, recalled: "... We went to see this picture *The Fighting Devil Dogs*. And we decided then that we were going in the Marine Corps." Myers, along with others who were influenced by the movies, knew nothing of the Marine Corps's practice of racial exclusion. Like other Montford Pointers, he would not discover this until he arrived at the induction center. At the induction center, a Marine gunnery sergeant informed Myers that he would be a Marine, and then told him, "You don't want to go there. That's the first to fight and the first to die." Myers responded: "I don't mind dying. But I am going to take a whole lot of them [America's enemies] with me."<sup>27</sup>

Drafted in 1945, Glenn White, from Washington, D.C., was in the majority of southern born African Americans who knew absolutely nothing about the racial history of the Marine Corps. White stated, "I didn't know anything about it, I didn't know nothing about it, in fact I didn't know nothing about it 'till I got to Montford Point." White was not even aware that he would be training at an all-black facility, "They

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<sup>26</sup> Clarence E. Willie, *African American Voices from Iwo Jima: Personal Accounts of the Battle* (Jefferson, NC; McFarland & Company, 2010), 165.

<sup>27</sup> Sergeant Joseph Myers from Atlanta, Georgia, volunteered to join the Corps after completing high school. He served as a drill instructor at Montford Point; he participated in the invasion of Iwo Jima, Japan, served on Guam, and participated in the occupation of Japan. See Joseph Myers, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, June 29, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Myers\\_Joseph.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Myers_Joseph.html) (hereafter cited as Myers interview); Myers also quoted in McLaurin, *Marines of Montford Point*, 31. The story line for *The Fighting Devil Dogs* takes place in Singapore. Released in 1938, this episodic serial featured two U.S. Marine Lieutenants, Tom Grayson and Frank Corby, who discover the threat of a new enemy called "The Lightning," a masked villain who uses a powerful lightning-based weapon in his bid for world domination.



[recruiters] didn't tell me nothing like that. No, I didn't know I was going to an all-black Marine Corps [facility] at that time. I learned everything after I got in the Marine Corps."<sup>28</sup> For some African Americans, the lack of information available pertaining to the Marine Corps's background and mission was a moot point; World War II was the time to take full advantage of proving to America that blacks were worthy of all the rights and privileges of citizenship.

Myers, who demonstrated tremendous patriotism as the door opened for blacks to enter the USMC, fully committed himself to the challenge. Myers's adjustment to life in the Corps was seamless. Recognized for his leadership potential, he graduated from Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) School and went on to become a drill instructor at Montford Point until 1944. Myers commented, "I brought them seven different platoons. I had some good guys and some wrong guys. I had to break it down and teach them [the] Marine Corps way. Which they later learned that that was the easiest way itself."<sup>29</sup>

Although drafted in 1943 and assigned to the Marine Corps rather than selecting the service of his choice, William Foreman embraced the challenge.<sup>30</sup> Unaware that

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<sup>28</sup> Gunnery Sergeant Glenn White, born in South Carolina, moved to Washington, D.C., where he completed high school and joined the Marine Corps. A thirty-year veteran of the USMC, White served in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. He retired from the Marines in 1973. See Glenn White, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, June 29, 2004, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/White\\_Glenn.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/White_Glenn.html) (hereafter cited as White interview).

<sup>29</sup> Myers interview.

<sup>30</sup> Beginning September 16, 1940, all inductees were enrolled into Selective Service, but after February 25, 1943, the Recruiting Service was authorized to discharge inductees to permit them to enlist in the Regular or Reserve Marine Corps. However, a stigma came to be attached to Selective Service inductees, unjustified, of course, this pseudo-voluntary procedure became very

African Americans had never been officially permitted in the Corps prior to 1942, Foreman believed, “There was such a tradition there, and there was one other of my comrades that went in before me and he was in the Marine Corps. And, I thought that would be something different from what we had seen in my community. Most of my other friends were carryovers from what we called the Civilian Conservation Corps [CCC]. And they went immediately into the Army. And I thought there should be something different so I had chosen the Marine Corps as mine.”<sup>31</sup>

As southern black recruits arrived at induction centers, they quickly learned that the Marine Corps had not allowed African Americans to serve in its ranks before 1942. Ruben Hines recalled: “I heard about that at Fort Benning, [Georgia], where we took our physical [examination] that blacks had not [been] permitted to enlist in the Marine Corps [before 1942]. They were not wanted. They didn’t, they didn’t take them. Period.” Hines further recalled being unsettled by this notion, despite growing up in a prejudicial and segregated society, he was not pleased to discover that for more than 140 years an entire group of people was denied the opportunity to serve their nation, based solely on ethnicity.<sup>32</sup>

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popular. See Julius A. Furer, *Administration of the Navy Department in World War II*, United States Navy Department (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1959), 567–568; see also Cameron, *American Samurai*, 61; Sledge, *With the Old Breed*, 171.

<sup>31</sup> Foreman interview.

<sup>32</sup> Gunnery Sergeant Ruben Hines, born in Chicago, returned to Alabama with his parents as a youth, where he received a grade school education. A career Marine, Hines served in the Pacific with the 52nd Defense Battalion during World War II. He also served in Korea, where he participated in the Chosin Reservoir campaign, and in Vietnam, where he served as a helicopter crew chief. After retiring from the Marine Corps, Hines attended the University of North Carolina, completing all the requirements for a doctorate in history except for the dissertation.

When asked why he decided to join the Marines, Ruben Hines described his experience with less fervor than Myers: “The word ‘join’ did not apply to me or to anybody else at that particular time. We were slated for the Marine Corps through volunteering for the draft. And after we got our physical, then that was what we called quota assignments to various branches of the service. It just so happened that I was selected to go into the Marine Corps [in 1942]. I didn’t know what the Marine Corps was. I knew something about the army. My brother was in the army, but I was selected among that quota. I enlisted, whatever you want to call it, in the Marine Corps. Some of the guys went on and some guys went in the navy. I was selected to go into the Marine Corps.”<sup>33</sup>

Hines was describing the myth and image the USMC sought to maintain throughout the war. Craig Cameron asserts that protecting its elitist image was a top priority for the Marine Corps; at the time, the Marines did not want to lose the essence of “true volunteerism.” Marine recruiters would discharge willing inductees in order to have them “enlist” into the regular forces or the Reserves, thus dropping the Selective Service (SS) tag attached after their names. The Selective Service designation was a “damning symbol” to Marine recruiters.<sup>34</sup> For the Marine Corps to obtain volunteers in

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He taught history at Fayetteville State College in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina. See Ruben Hines, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, May 17, 2004, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Hines\\_Ruben.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Hines_Ruben.html) (hereafter cited as Hines interview).

<sup>33</sup> Hines interview.

<sup>34</sup> The induction and processing of Marine inductees were the duties of the Recruiting Service and were performed as they had been for volunteers. At first, all inductees were enrolled into the Selective Service, but after February 25, 1943, the Recruiting Service was authorized to

the true sense of the word, its recruiters had to venture outside the 18–36 age group, which the Selective Service covered. Using the cosmetic device of dropping the “SS” proved most profitable for the Marine Corps. Between 1943 and 1945, this method drew more than 58,000 seventeen-year-olds into the Reserves, subject to calling them to active duty (Regulars) as they turned eighteen.<sup>35</sup> The draft’s significance was crucial in achieving the Corps’s manpower needs, despite its efforts to increase the organization’s visibility and “image of volunteerism.” According to the *Marine Corps Administrative*

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discharge inductees to permit them to enlist in the Regular or Reserve Marine Corps. However, a stigma came to be attached to Selective Service inductees, unjustified, of course, this pseudo-voluntary procedure became very popular. Of a total of 224,323 inductees, fewer than 70,000 chose to remain in inductee status. On February 11, 1943, the Marine Corps received its first recruits through the Selective Service. Results during this first month were disappointing, as only 9,349 men of a quota of 13,400 were actually assigned to the Marine Corps. Marine officials had hoped that recruiting goals would improve in subsequent months, but this was not the case. The Selective Service would not meet the monthly quota established for the USMC until June 1944. In August 1944, the number of inductees assigned to the Marine Corps once again fell below the quota established by the Selective Service. With the exception of July 1944, the Selective Service never again met the quota it agreed upon for the USMC. The Marine Corps was able to avert a serious manpower shortage only because voluntary enlistment by 17-year-olds was still permitted, a practice that began in February 1943, the month of the first Marine draft call. The Commandant of the Marine Corps directed the heads of Recruiting Divisions to build up a pool of men in this age group by enlisting them in the Reserves and placing them on inactive duty subject to call. During the remaining months of World War II, this pool was drawn upon repeatedly. Of the 275,985 men who entered the Marine Corps between February 1, 1943 and July 31, 1945, 58,927 were 17 year-old volunteers. See Furer, *Administration of the Navy Department in World War II*, 567–568; Cameron, *American Samurai*, 61; Sledge, *With the Old Breed*, 171.

<sup>35</sup> Furer, *Administration of the Navy Department in World War II*, 568; Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Executive Order 9279: “Providing for the Most Effective Mobilization and Utilization of the National Manpower and Transferring the Selection Service System to the War Manpower Commission,” December 5, 1942, Record Group 211: Records of the War Manpower Commission, 1936–1947 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration); Cameron, *American Samurai*, 61.

*History*, which recorded monthly inductions (volunteer and Selective Service) from February 1941 through July 1945, approximately 80 percent of those who entered the Corps in 1943 did so through the Selective Service, whether “volunteering” at the induction centers or not. Without the Selective Service, the Marines could not have made up the difference through recruiting volunteers.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the avid rush of volunteers to enlist following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Marine Corps found itself at a disadvantage when the Selective Service, the other branches of service, and the federal service organizations all drew from the same limited pool of manpower. Cameron contends that by the end of 1942, Marine recruiters struggled to meet monthly recruiting goals as rapidly as Congress increased authorized manning levels—even after entrance requirements were lowered. The Marines had no choice but to fall under the guidelines of the Selective Service, which would ensure that personnel were going to be more equitably distributed among all the services.<sup>37</sup>

In March 1943, as the U.S. Army, Navy and Marine Corps struggled to meet their personnel needs, Paul V. McNutt, chairman of the War Manpower Commission, insisted that the armed forces accelerate the induction of African Americans. Without delay, the *Pittsburgh Courier* reported, “This new policy of apportioning colored selectees among the Army, Navy and Marine Corps is said to have the approval of the

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<sup>36</sup> United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Administrative History*, dated 1946, Typed manuscript, Record Group 287: Publications of the U.S. Government, 1790–2006 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration), 15–17; Cameron, *American Samurai*, 58, 61; Sledge, *With the Old Breed*, 171.

<sup>37</sup> Of the 19,168 African American Marines that served during the war, 16,039 were drafted. The first Marine draftees received their induction notices in November 1942 and reported to boot camp in February 1943. See Cameron, *American Samurai*, 61.

White House. It is designed to solve the problem of the large number of colored men passed over in the induction process. Until recently, the Navy and the Marine Corps met their personnel needs through voluntary enlistments, but restricted the enlistments of colored men.”<sup>38</sup>

When officials in Washington urged the services to increase their number of African Americans, the Marine Corps attempted to provide a sense of unity as blacks came through training at Montford Point. Initially, white Marines staffed all the positions at Montford Point, officers, non-commissioned officers, and drill instructors. There is speculation that these men were chosen for duty at Montford Point given their service in the Caribbean, Nicaragua, and the Philippines, which was deemed to constitute experience with “colored” troops.<sup>39</sup> There is further speculation that only “southern” white Marines were placed in charge of blacks during the war because white southerners were better prepared or qualified to deal with blacks. The accuracy of this notion and practice is highly questionable. Anthony Caputo, from Montclair, New

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<sup>38</sup> “Army, Navy To Call 1,080,000 Negroes,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 20, 1943. See also Morris J. MacGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces, 1940–1965* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, Center of Military History, United States Army, 1981), 100–104; Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts, 1939–1953* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 53.

<sup>39</sup> McLaurin, *Marines of Montford Point*, 49; Ulysses G. Lee, Jr., *The Employment of Negro Troops* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2000), 179–204; Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 163–164. See also Bell I. Wiley, *The Training of Negro Troops* (Washington, D.C.: Army Ground Forces Historical Section, 1946); Jean Byers, *A Study of the Negro in Military Service* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 1950).

Jersey, was the first company commander selected to serve in the 51st Defense Battalion.<sup>40</sup>

Before entering the Marines, Caputo's only exposure to the South was when he traveled to play sports at Duke University, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and Wake Forest University. Caputo, who grew up with blacks, admits that he gave little thought to segregation and racial discrimination. He had no qualms or trepidations with the assignment of training and working with the first African American Marines: "I just took it as another challenge, something for me to do as a duty, and that I would do the very best I could. No matter [where] I was assigned, there or some other assignment. It was still a responsibility of a Marine officer to do the best he could under the circumstances."<sup>41</sup>

Considering that Caputo's observations are in keeping with the times, it appears that he did not possess a genuine connection with, or concern for, black Marines. When asked if he believed his background, in terms of relating to minorities, was a factor in his selection to serve at Montford Point, Caputo naïvely replied: "I don't think I was selected because of my prior experience with African Americans at all. I think I was just selected because, Colonel Woods thought that I could do the job. And he asked, the

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<sup>40</sup> Colonel Anthony Caputo joined the Marines in 1941. He was commissioned on November 1, 1941, after graduating from the University of Pennsylvania. During World War II, Caputo served as the Battery "A" company commander in the 51st Defense Battalion on Guam and Okinawa, Japan. He also fought in Korea and served as a staff officer in Vietnam. See Anthony Caputo, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, June 29, 2004, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Caputo\\_Anthony.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Caputo_Anthony.html) (hereafter cited as Caputo interview).

<sup>41</sup> Caputo interview.

general [Allen H. Turnage, base commander of Camp Lejeune] if he could take me with him, and that's what happened." Caputo debunked the myth concerning white Marines, who served in Latin America and the Philippines, being selected due to their experiences with "colored" troops during the 1920s and 1930s. He stated, "I don't remember anything like that. The DIs [drill instructors] were selected because of their backgrounds [for] having dealt with other African Americans or other than that. No, I don't remember that. I know that they were selected because they were good men, and they were, they were experienced in training men. And actually, they were very good DIs. And they did a good job. I know nothing about their previous background, and how they were selected, other than the fact that they could train [Marines], they were good at training individuals."<sup>42</sup>

Beyond training duties, Caputo was asked if anything had been brought to his attention or if he had ever heard of any social problems that Montford Pointers encountered while off base. Surprisingly, Caputo recalled, "As long as I was with [black Marines] at Montford Point, I don't think I ever had any experiences with any of this kind of [adverse] treatment on the base or off the base. No problems were ever brought to me."<sup>43</sup> It is evident, that although hand selected to serve at Montford Point in 1941, as the first company commander (Battery "A") in the 51st Defense Battalion, Caputo was either an absentee leader or wore blinders. It would have been impossible for him not to have heard about the bus seizure involving Joseph Myers in October 1942.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.



After a few hours of waiting for the bus in New Bern, Myers and several other black Marines took over a bus when they were not permitted to board: “We took the bus over and drove the bus back to [Montford Point] camp. We had some guys and they were pretty strong. So, what we did, we just took the guys that we were having [a] problem with, [the] white driver, [sat] him outside the bus, and we took the bus and drove it back to the camp.” Myers and the others were immediately greeted by the MPs as they arrived at Montford Point. After turning the bus over, Colonel Woods reprimanded the Marines, informing them that this type of behavior was unacceptable.<sup>44</sup> As a company commander, Caputo reported daily to Colonel Woods and served with the 51st through 1945! Nevertheless, he held to the notion: “As far as I’m concerned, I don’t remember any of these problems, I’m not saying there weren’t any there [Montford Point]. But, I don’t remember them.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Myers interview. Returning to Jacksonville proved to be difficult on a Jim Crow bus line. Drivers gave priority to white passengers, as state law required, and restricted black passengers to the rear of the bus, unless whites needed space. Since blacks and whites formed separate lines at the bus stop, drivers tended to take only whites on board and leave black Marines, in uniform, fully aware of the deadline for returning to Montford Point. When this happened, frustrated black Marines, at the risk of being subjected to violence by the local police, might commandeer a bus, remove the driver, and take it to the gate nearest Jacksonville, where the transit company could retrieve it the following morning. See Nalty, *Right to Fight*, 5–6. The distance from New Bern to Jacksonville is approximately 37 miles. For more on the public transit system during the Jim Crow era, see Catherine A. Barnes, *Journey from Jim Crow: The Desegregation of Southern Transit* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

<sup>45</sup> Caputo interview. United States Marine Corps, Battery A, 51st Composite Defense Battalion Muster Roll, August 1942, Record Group 127: Records of the United States Marine Corps (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration). See also Shaw and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 5.

Caputo's testimony stands in sharp contrast to the majority of the Montford Pointers' accounts that address life on and off base. One possible explanation is that by early 1943, black NCOs operated Montford Point. Averet Corley asserted, "It was an all black base. The officers of the day were white. And after 1600, they'd leave, there'd be one officer of the day left on the base, and everything else was black. So consequently, on the base, you weren't bothered too much with racial tensions, racial prejudices and things. The base was very nice. And that was our sanctuary."<sup>46</sup> Corley's account and description of the officer corps could explain, but not justify, Caputo's behavior and speak to the inconsistency of his recollections.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, in 1944, the 51st traveled by train from North Carolina to San Diego, California, and encountered several Jim Crow incidents before departing to the South Pacific.

It bears repeating that Caputo was the first company commander at Montford Point; he served with the 51st from 1942 through 1945. Even supposing he was unaware of these incidents, it still does not explain why two white platoon commanders, Lieutenants John D'Angelo and Kenneth Graham, would often patrol the streets of Jacksonville when their black Marines were on liberty. These white lieutenants were

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<sup>46</sup> Averet Corley, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, July 23, 2004, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Corley\\_Averet.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Corley_Averet.html) (hereafter cited as Corley interview).

<sup>47</sup> Nalty, *Right to Fight*, 6; see also Memorandum, Deputy Chief of Staff to Commanding General, Army Air Forces, August 10, 1942, Professional Qualities of Officers Assigned to Negro Units, Record Group 220: Records of the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces (College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).

ready to intercede on their behalf when harassed by locals in 1943.<sup>48</sup> They were not the only officers who looked out for their men. Captain John Blackett, commanding officer of the 8th Marine Ammunition Company, “spoke out long and loud about his uncompromising stand that under no circumstance would the staff or anyone else under his command support racism, prejudice, discrimination or oppression.”<sup>49</sup>

Leaders such as Blackett, D’Angelo, and Graham—exceptional in their own right assuming the manner in which they treated black Marines—who earned the respect of their men, could not change the tide of a segregationist country. Like so many other Montford Pointers, Joseph Carpenter decided that it was easier to simply accept and endure the laws of Jim Crow. For Montford Pointers, the reach of the government could not change the deep-seated racial attitudes of white America, and in turn, prevented black Marines from exerting their natural rights as citizens, but more importantly as men. Turner Blount summed it up best after General Larsen’s speech, “The top [Marines], the whites, didn’t want you.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Gerald Astor, *The Right to Fight: A History of African Americans in the Military* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 229, 262; see also Culp, *First Black United States Marines*, 89.

<sup>49</sup> United States Marine Corps, Muster of the Eighth Field Depot for February 1945, Record Group 127: Records of the United States Marine Corps (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration); Astor, *Right to Fight*, 228; Blackett quoted in Culp, *First Black United States Marines*, 89.

<sup>50</sup> Blount interview. As a general rule, African American Marines inherited disgruntled and therefore less effective white officers. They were also issued, and trained with, inferior gear and equipment; in addition, their training was usually subpar to the level of their white counterparts, who were trained at Parris Island, SC and Camp Pendleton, CA. Moreover, African American Marines were expected to do as well or better than white Marines who were better equipped,

George Taylor, who entering in 1943, recalled, “When we went in, we weren’t even considered as a whole man. We were considered as half a man. And if people say, ‘why?’ ‘How come?’ I said, the white boys got stripes on both arms. But we only got them on one. That’s how you determine where you was at.”<sup>51</sup> These obstacles that tested black Marines’ sense of equality, identity, and manhood were painful; however, they remained strong and secure, relying on one another during challenging times. Simultaneously, challenges arose within the ranks of the Montford Pointers; black northerners were viewed as “gangsters” and troublemakers, and black southerners were viewed as “submissive.” Taylor described how, at times, northern and southern culture among blacks and whites clashed: “We had the black southerner. We had the black northerner. Some of them was good. Some of them was bad. So, you had to fight some of the black southerners, plus you had to fight the white man in order to be able to relax and do what you had to do. And that’s the way it was.”<sup>52</sup> For many northern black Marines, this internal friction became less of an issue after the initial weeks of Marine Corps indoctrination and acclimation to the South. Additionally, for their own safety, black northern enlistees had to take a neutral position concerning the race situation for fear of reprisals.<sup>53</sup>

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better trained, and better officered. See John F. Marszalek, Jr., “The Black Man in Military History,” *Negro History Bulletin* 36 (October 1973): 124.

<sup>51</sup> George Taylor, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, June 29, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Taylor\\_George.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Taylor_George.html) (hereafter cited as Taylor interview).

<sup>52</sup> Taylor interview; see also “Civilians Made Into Marines at Lejeune,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, November 27, 1943.

<sup>53</sup> Astor, *Right to Fight*, 230.

Furthermore, black drill instructors hazed black recruits. With the influx of new recruits, the use of privates first class (PFC) with fewer than three months of service as drill instructors to indoctrinate and train new recruits led to less effective training. Assigning recent recruits was far from ideal. Inexperienced drill instructors failed to adhere to the established guidelines, and found it even more difficult to assert authority over men their own age without resorting to hazing.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, Marines such as Glenn White and Henry McNair found a suitable balance with adjusting to military life and coping with Jim Crow. White described what occurred upon reaching the gates at Montford Point for the first time: “When I got to Montford Point the MP at the gates stopped me and he said, ‘what can I do for you son, you come to see your father or shine shoes?’ I told him [what I was there for and] I said [to myself] because I was a Marine from then on, it’s ‘yes sir’ and ‘no sir’ and not too many no sirs. I did exactly what they said and that was all, we didn’t give them no back lip.”<sup>55</sup>

Keenly aware of status as an African American in North Carolina, Glenn White focused on avoiding downtown Jacksonville: “I went straight to D.C. where I had lived; when we finished up they gave us all a 14 day, 14 or 21 days leave.” He visited Kinston and New Bern a few times, but steered clear of Jacksonville. White further stated, “I didn’t have to be told [where not to go]. You didn’t, after you got there and found out what you had to do [as a black person in the South] you acted accordingly and

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<sup>54</sup> Cameron, *American Samurai*, 57; Culp, *First Black United States Marines*, 104. For incidents involving hazing among Montford Pointers, see transcript of Taylor Interview.

<sup>55</sup> White interview.

everything was fine. You stood in line and nobody bothered you.”<sup>56</sup> White is of a small minority of Marines that claim they never had any social issues while on leave or liberty. Examples of compliant African Americans such as Glenn White are fairly uncommon; notwithstanding, Henry McNair, who entered the Marines in 1945, also avoided the appearance of any situation that could lead to trouble. McNair explained, “There was a lot of racism [in Jacksonville], but I never got tangled in with any of it, you pretty much knew where to go.”<sup>57</sup>

Regardless of their regional differences, *all* black Marines learned to be patient on and off base. Joseph Carpenter asserted, “When we went out on leave some of us got arrested for impersonating Marines. And they had to send white officers to get us out of jail. I wasn’t one of them, but there were a lot of people, several of them went to Texas and they were arrested and they had to send the white officers ... to get the Marines out.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Staff Sergeant Henry McNair, from Dillon, South Carolina, served with the 52nd Defense Battalion during the occupation phases of Saipan and Guam. A career Marine, he saw combat during the Korean War in both the Inchon and Chosin Reservoir campaigns and in Vietnam. Upon retirement he resided in Jacksonville, North Carolina, until his death in 2006. See Henry McNair, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, August 17, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/McNair\\_Henry.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/McNair_Henry.html) (hereafter cited as McNair interview).

<sup>58</sup> Carpenter interview. The average white Marine’s attitude toward black Marines reflected the canons of both black and white American society. To most whites, black Marines had no more rights than the average black civilian. For African Americans, wearing the Marine Corps’s uniform did not change the social mores of the United States, nor did it easily shift racial opinions. Black Marines were viewed as second-class citizens in the eyes of white Americans, and were treated as such. Black Marines’ demands for equal treatment and rights were viewed with the same skepticism within both the military and American society. Only in isolated

Perhaps most galling, which compounded the insults and blatant disregard for blacks, was that enemy prisoners of war (POWs), Germans and Italians, were accorded better treatment, respect, and greater common courtesy in the United States than African American Marines. While stationed in Norfolk, Virginia, Carpenter described how POWs had more freedom than black Marines: “When we were sent to Norfolk we were stationed right opposite, or adjacent, to the Italian prisoners. Now they had freedom of the base, freedom of Norfolk City, which we didn’t have, and when we caught the bus to the train, we had to sit in the back [and] they could sit anywhere they wanted and they were supposed to be our prisoners. Blacks were always [placed in] a separate part of the camp. Anyway, and then that’s where they put us [and the prisoners] ‘cause the whites were elsewhere on the base.” Carpenter further explained the freedom of POWs, “They could go anywhere in town they wanted, we could only go in the black section. And of course, they could ride in the back of the train or anywhere on the train they wanted, but we had to get in the car right behind the coal car or the baggage car, whichever one was there. And, buses, they sat in front and we sat in the back.”<sup>59</sup>

David Dinkins recalled, “One thing that sticks in my mind was that the prisoners of war, Italian and German prisoners of war, some of them were guarded by black soldiers. And they were treated better than those people who were protecting our

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incidents did white Marines side with their black counterparts; moreover, contact between black and white Marines was minimal due to segregation—on and off base. It was only naturally that when white and black Marines interacted it was in the accustomed role of superior-inferior. See Marszalek, “The Black Man in Military History,” 124.

<sup>59</sup> Carpenter interview.

country, soldiers and Marines. That I remember.”<sup>60</sup> Regarding the on base privileges for POWs, Averet Corley also described an encounter he had with a German POW at the Post Exchange (PX) in Norfolk, Virginia: “I wanted to go over [to the PX] and get a malted milk or a Coke. And blacks couldn’t go in there. I had to pay the German POW a quarter to get me a malted milk. And he couldn’t understand that. He said, ‘you’re a Black soldier, you’re American black, you’re American soldier. This is your country.’ He said, ‘I’ll get your malted milk and anything else you want.’ And he was, they were just standing around picking up cigarette butts and things. They weren’t doing anything. And he could not understand. And that kind of got to me. You know. Here a prisoner of war has more privileges than a black American, you know.”<sup>61</sup>

As the war came to a close, white America began to forget the sacrifices made, in the name of democracy, by so many blacks in defense of the nation. Roland Durden, who served with the 33rd Marine Depot Company in 1944, recalled, “The 33rd and 34th Depot traveled together on a troop train from North Carolina going south toward New Orleans where we picked up German prisoners. [We traveled with] two carloads of German prisoners [as] we headed out west. When we got somewhere in the West we stopped for either coal or water, [and] the Red Cross nurses came out to the train to give

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<sup>60</sup> David Dinkins, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, July 21, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Dinkins\\_David.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Dinkins_David.html) (hereafter cited as Dinkins interview).

<sup>61</sup> Corley interview.



us coffee and donuts. Our captain, who was white said, ‘Serve the Germans first.’ Our Red Cross nurses said, ‘No, we’ll serve our boys first.’”<sup>62</sup>

This particular treatment African Americans received from white Marine officers was typical, but the response from the Red Cross nurses was uncharacteristic. Most of the nurses boldly trumped the power and ideology of Jim Crow, especially during a time when the laws of segregation were so expansive. Corley explained that while aboard ship and traveling through the Panama Canal, “All black troops had to stay on board and white troops could have liberty. Because in that segment, in Colón [Panama], the [white] Americans didn’t want blacks mingling with the other folks [Panamanians].”<sup>63</sup> The reach of Jim Crow was limitless, and its customs never rested among white and black Americans. Corley further explained, “In fact, there was a [white] girl from Indianapolis, Catherine Hicks, a Red Cross girl. [During this time all Red Cross nurses were white]. So [a] black sailor asked one of these white girls to dance, and she said, ‘how dare you ask a white woman to dance.’”<sup>64</sup> This example demonstrates the steadfast nature of Jim Crow; its laws transcended all borders.

While serving in the Ellice Islands, under a brand new commander, Darden recalled, “Colonel Curtis W. LeGette [the commander of the 7th Defense Battalion] told us, ‘it’s a disgrace to be seen with boys like you. They got boys like you working on my

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<sup>62</sup> Roland Durden, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, July 23, 2004, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Durden\\_Roland.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Durden_Roland.html) (hereafter cited as Durden interview); see also United States Marine Corps, Muster of the Eighth Field Depot for February 1945, Record Group 127: Records of the United States Marine Corps (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).

<sup>63</sup> Corley interview.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. Corley grew up in Indianapolis, Indiana.

plantation, down in South Carolina. They tell me you have no discipline.”<sup>65</sup>

Additionally, in his first speech to the men, he used the phrase “you people,” which convinced many African Americans that LeGette did not consider them to be real Marines.

Much in the same manner as Charles Francis Adams, Jr., who, in July of 1862, emphatically wrote, “the idea of arming the blacks *as soldiers* must be abandoned ... the Negro is holly unfit for cavalry service.”<sup>66</sup> Colonel LeGette believed the same about black Marines, “wholly unfit.” Similar to Adams, who, with confidence in 1863, later wrote to his father: “The Negro regiment question is our greatest victory of the war so far, and, I can assure you, that in the army, these [men] are so much a success that they will soon be the fashion.”<sup>67</sup> LeGette, after nearly two years in command, found himself also praising the wartime contributions of blacks. On December 13, 1944 when he turned the battalion over to Lieutenant Colonel Gould P. Groves, Darden recalled that LeGette apologized for his initial comments, “I want you to know, I didn’t want to leave

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<sup>65</sup> Darden interview.

<sup>66</sup> A Civil War Union Brevet Brigadier General and member of the prominent Adams family (father: Charles F. Adams, grandfather: John Quincy Adams), at age 26 he volunteered for the Union Army, and was commissioned a first Lieutenant in Company H, First Massachusetts Volunteer Cavalry. He served with his company as it fought in South Carolina and in the September 1862 Antietam Campaign. Promoted to Captain and commander of Company H on October 30, 1862, he directed the unit during its participation in the June–July 1863 Gettysburg Campaign, and fought in the heavy cavalry clash at Aldie, Virginia, on June 17, 1863. Commissioned a Lieutenant Colonel on 15 July 1864, Adams then received orders to be second in command of the Fifth Massachusetts (Colored) Volunteer Cavalry. The regiment fought in the Siege of Petersburg, Virginia. See Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861–1865* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1956), 132.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

you. I'd like to go back to the States with you. But I can't, but I want you to know, I've never served with a better bunch of men in all my life." Standing there with tears in his eyes, he told the Marines, "You have shown me that you can soldier with the best of 'em."<sup>68</sup> Both men led African Americans during wars when national survival was in question, and both men discovered that victory would only be achieved through a united effort.

Although opinions slowly changed regarding the wartime performance of African American Marines, overt racism continued to loom. Aware of the customs and laws of the segregated South, Ruben Hines struggled to cope with racism. He described the racist and demeaning behavior of two Marine officers, Lieutenant Russell S. La Pointe and Warrant Officer Augustine, with particular passion: "[La Pointe] was very vicious in his reaction to us, and in his demeanor and his language. I thought that was really inhumane. He also used the word nigger. And he had no qualms about it whatsoever. When he [Augustine] used the term 'you people,' and he used [it] so derogatorily it made you want to vomit. He would say, 'you people are no people. And when I saw you people [come into] the Marine Corps only then did I realize there was a war going on.' And it made us feel pretty bad. Made me feel bad."<sup>69</sup>

Hines understood the Marine Corps was racist and the perception was that the majority of Marines, black and white, were from the South; nonetheless, it bothered him more as an American than as a Marine. The United States was at war, fighting for democracy abroad, and called for unity from *all* its citizens. Hines not only believed, but

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<sup>68</sup> Darden interview. LeGette quoted in Nalty, *Right to Fight*, 16.

<sup>69</sup> Hines interview.

also knew, that national “unity” started and ended with whites. Prattis argued that the average white, “free, white and twenty-one,” thinks, feels, and does whatever he desires; he is indifferent to what others think because he is “the people.” The majority of African Americans subscribed to this idea, yielding to this independence of mind, willing, if not eager, to join in any undertaking that white leadership deemed expedient for national unity.<sup>70</sup>

Despite adhering to this white prescription, opinions did shift, and national unity grew one community at a time as black Marines returned home. Howard Williams, a Virginia native, was drafted in 1943 after graduating from high school. Williams recalled an incident on the train while traveling to boot camp: “I remember once, in my hometown, as we were boarding, getting ready to go to the Corps, a [white] person, said, ‘oh, this is the first time I’ve ever seen a black Marine.’”<sup>71</sup> Upon returning home to the black community in Emporia, Virginia, Williams described, “Well, they were happy, you know, those that knew me and [who] I grew up with, they were happy to see me as a Marine and my little, uniform that was different from the Army and the Navy which they were accustomed to, and of course, they knew that the Marine Corps had not really accepted, blacks, and, of course, they wanted to know, if we were superman, that type of

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<sup>70</sup> Prattis, “The Morale of the Negro in the Armed Forces of the United States,” 357.

<sup>71</sup> Sergeant Howard L. Williams served with the First Ammunition Company at Saipan and during the invasion of Okinawa, Japan. See Howard Williams, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, August 30, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Williams\\_Howard.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Williams_Howard.html) (hereafter cited as Williams interview).

thing.”<sup>72</sup> Ellis Cunningham, who joined the Marines in 1944, also described an experience in which he saw a black Marine in his neighborhood: “When he came [home] on boot camp leave, wearing his green uniform, I said, my goodness, what kind of Marine is that? I didn’t know him personally, before he went into the Marine Corps, but I got to know him afterwards. And that’s when I first heard about Montford Point, but it still didn’t sink in.”<sup>73</sup>

The experiences of Williams and Cunningham speak to the fact that the Marine Corps, after excluding blacks since the American Revolution, attempted to enlist African American recruits who had no familial tradition of service as U.S. Marines, meaning that no one joined because his grandfather, father, uncle, or brother had been a Marine.<sup>74</sup> In 1942, when the federal government officially authorized blacks to enter the USMC and don the Marine Corps uniform for the first time in history, these men began their adjustment to a new way of life in the military, however, the United States struggled to fully accept and treat them as equals. As Marines, blacks were first viewed as blacks, at times something less, and if lucky, they were viewed as a pseudo-Marine afterwards.

The Marine Corps, intent on protecting its exclusive past and elitist image, was ultimately forced to recruit blacks through the Selective Service. The effects of the draft

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<sup>72</sup> Williams interview.

<sup>73</sup> First Sergeant Ellis Cunningham was born on a farm near Florence, South Carolina. He participated in the invasion on Iwo Jima, Japan. A career Marine, he served in Korea and in Vietnam, where he participated in the Tet Offensive campaign, retiring from the Marine Corps in 1970. See Ellis Cunningham, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, June 29, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Cunningham\\_Ellis.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Cunningham_Ellis.html) (hereafter cited as Cunningham interview).

<sup>74</sup> Culp, *First Black United States Marines*, 1.

yielded a new tradition of service for African Americans as U.S. Marines. Once in place, blacks sought to prove their worth and show their strength through unity of purpose.

White America participated in World War II as a remarkably unified nation. In black America, however, a strong current of apathy was evident. The draft did not inspire much confidence for African Americans, but they fought nonetheless, some with less apathy than others, while others embraced the struggle. For African Americans the realities of war brought into sharp relief their duality in American society.<sup>75</sup>

As World War II took shape, Adolf Hitler promised to bring to the world a “new order” at the barrel tip of a gun, while President Roosevelt offered an alternative vision of a new order. He identified Allied war aims predicated upon “hope, rather than fear,” “opportunity rather than enslavement,” “free expression rather than repression,” and “cooperation rather than domination.” According to Roosevelt, these fundamental *Four Freedoms* were guaranteed to the average American and embodied by the New Deal. Roosevelt offered these freedoms to the world as “the foundations of a healthy and strong democracy.”<sup>76</sup> However, these words rang hollow, falling on the deaf ears of millions of African Americans.

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<sup>75</sup> Michael C. C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), xi–xv, 69; Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, “Blacks, Loyalty, and Motion-Picture Propaganda in World War II,” *Journal of American History* 73 (September 1986): 383.

<sup>76</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Annual Message to Congress, January 6, 1941, Record Group 46: Records of the U.S. Senate, 1789–2006 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration) (hereafter cited as Roosevelt, “Four Freedoms Speech”); see also Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 469–470, 760.

Walter White, Executive Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), asserted that African Americans had to “fight for the right to fight” for democracy. In December 1941, Horace Cayton, a Chicago sociologist and black leader, posed the question: “Am I a Negro first and then a policeman or soldier second, or should I forget in any emergency situation the fact that ... my first loyalty is to my race?” Millions of African Americans had to ask themselves this question during World War II.<sup>77</sup>

“This nation has placed its destiny in the hands and heads and hearts of its millions of free men and women, and its faith in freedom under the guidance of God. Freedom means the supremacy of human rights everywhere. Our support goes to those who struggle to gain those rights and keep them. Our strength is our unity of purpose.”<sup>78</sup> FDR’s words were an illusion for many African Americans of the 1940s. The United States of America was the beacon of freedom. However, the African American portion of the millions of “free men and women,” who answered the call of duty for a country that defined freedom as “the supremacy of human rights,” often found themselves treated as second-rate.

For African Americans, serving as a U.S. Marine was a notable accomplishment, and a highly visible action during the 1940s that contributed to America’s civil rights

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<sup>77</sup> Walter F. White, “Right to Fight for Democracy,” *Survey Graphic* 31 (November 1942): 472; Horace R. Cayton, “Negro Morale,” *Opportunity Journal Magazine* 19 (December 1941): 371; Chad L. Williams, “Vanguards of the New Negro: African American Veterans and Post-World War I Racial Militancy,” *Journal of African American History* 92 (Summer 2007): 347–352.

<sup>78</sup> Roosevelt, “Four Freedoms Speech.”

movement of the 1960s. While black Marines saw military service as an opportunity to prove their individual worth and to help raise the prestige of their group, thereby striking a blow against segregation, the laws of Jim Crow remained steadfast and relentless. In turn, the Marine Corps was greatly handicapped in filling its ranks as it manipulated the draft in order to preserve its elitist and exclusive white image.<sup>79</sup> For black Marines, balancing their loyalty between their race and their country proved to be quite the task, and remained in question as the war progressed.

Furthermore, segregation interfered with the optimal training of African Americans with high potential. Notwithstanding, in the face of these handicaps and obstacles black Marines encountered while in uniform, their actions positively changed the impressions of many Americans and white Marines. As *esprit de corps* gradually increased among white and black Marines, initial racial opinions shifted, giving way to a new breed of Devil Dogs that was more representative of a unified and diverse nation engaged in a military and ideological struggle for freedom and democracy at home and abroad.

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<sup>79</sup> Martin Binkin, Mark J. Eitelberg, Alvin J. Schexnider, and Marvin M. Smith, *Blacks and the Military: Studies in Defense Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1982), 23.



CHAPTER IV  
TASK ORGANIZATION AND COMBAT EMPLOYMENT OF BLACK MARINES  
AND THE U.S. ARMY MODEL

On the eve of World War II, one of the top priorities for many African Americans was to ensure that they could *fully* and *equally* participate in the Armed Forces of the United States. African Americans demanded equal opportunities, but also an increasing number called for ending racial segregation and explicit discrimination involved in the separation of the races in civilian society as well. Historian Neil A. Wynn asserts that reformers opposed racial restrictions on military service because such limitations weakened “claims to the same rights and privileges as other American citizens: If blacks could fight as equals, then blacks could expect to be recognized and rewarded as equals.” Similar arguments had been made during World War I, and once again military service during World War II thus became central to the civil rights campaign. In addition, “the logic of the black argument was further strengthened by American and Allied propaganda, which emphasized democratic principles and practices.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Neil A. Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1975), 21. For more on African American responses to World War I and during the interwar period, see Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

During World War II, the employment of African Americans “generally resulted from a combination of four factors.” In order of importance these can be ranked as a “demand for increased production, a shortage in the labor supply, the intervention of federal government agencies, notably the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), and the pressure applied by African Americans and others interested in ending racial discrimination.” The first two factors soon became decisive. The second two were less effective.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter introduces alternative approaches to utilizing blacks in other branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. It evaluates the role of African Americans who had participated in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) program, and based on the framework of the CCC, concludes that the White House could have applied pressure to the Marine Corps to commission blacks. Additionally, it examines how the U.S. Army made greater strides toward racial justice and equality by allowing blacks to serve as commissioned officers, although in segregated units; whereas the Marine Corps instituted no comparable reform during the war. Furthermore, this chapter contends that the Marine Corps could have commissioned blacks by following three salient examples selected for comparison: The Army’s model of task organization and combat employment of black soldiers in the 93rd Infantry Division, which deployed to the Pacific, and the 99th Pursuit Squadron and the 332nd Fighter Group, America’s first all-black flying units (the Tuskegee Airmen). Apart from fighting endless bouts of racism within their service communities, these units serve as examples of the Army’s steps

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<sup>2</sup> A. Russell Buchanan, *Blacks in World War II* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1977), 39.

toward affording African Americans greater opportunities to serve in technical and frontline combat occupational specialties and assignments, rather than limited to noncombat assignments (i.e., by restricting blacks to auxiliary/service and support units) in accordance with Marine Corps directives.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was a New Deal program that operated from 1933 to 1942 in the United States for unemployed, unmarried men, ages 17–28 from families receiving relief assistance. President Franklin D. Roosevelt approved the design of the CCC to provide employment for young men in relief families who had difficulty finding jobs during the Great Depression while at the same time implementing a general natural resource conservation program in every state and territory. The CCC was a success; the maximum enrollment at any one time was 300,000. During the nine-year period of the CCC approximately three million young men participated in the program, serving, on average, a period of approximately ten months. U.S. Army Reserve officers were in charge of the residential work centers and camps, but there was no military training or issue of U.S. Army uniforms.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, members of the Civilian Conservation Corps were issued U.S. Government military-style uniforms, held titles

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<sup>3</sup> Michael W. Sherraden, “Military Participation in a Youth Employment Program: The Civilian Conservation Corps,” *Armed Forces & Society* 7 (Winter 1981): 227. For images of the uniforms worn by members of the CCC, see Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Records of the Division of Planning and Public Relations, Record Group 35: Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1953 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration); Olen Cole Jr., *The African-American Experience in the Civilian Conservation Corps* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 32–41; Stan Cohen, *The Tree Army: A Pictorial History of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1942* (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing, 1980), 10, 12, 15, 32–33, 38, 42–43, 51, 56–63, 81, 121, 129, 156–162.

such as “recruits” and “enrollees,” and were organized into “companies.”<sup>4</sup> These terms are more commonly associated with the military than with civilian organizations. The U.S. Army, “centrally involved in the day-to-day operations of the CCC camps and in a significant position of influence regarding policy in Washington, played a key role.” Historian Charles W. Johnson contends that beyond operating the camps and serving on the CCC Director’s Advisory Council, War Department personnel were given responsibility for the supply, administration, medical care, sanitation, education, and welfare of this conservation army.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, some observers believed a military tone pervaded CCC camps.

The U.S. Army’s presidential appointment and stewardship over the Civilian Conservation Corps demonstrated that military involvement was key in creating the program and that it would run according to the president’s desires. The CCC is a valuable case study of military performance that addressed the needs of the youth and temporary national employment. Additionally, it continued with an established framework for a *separate but equal* role for African Americans in the military.

Historians and scholars agree that, by and large, the Civilian Conservation Corps was popular with the public and successful as both an income redistribution program and

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<sup>4</sup> Upon entering the Civilian Conservation Corps, each enrollee subscribed to an “Oath of Enrollment/Enlistment.” It was a contract between the enrollee and the U.S. Government, and was required to be lived up to in each respect of the oath. Additionally, enrollees received “Certificates of Discharge” from the CCC. See Cohen, *Tree Army*, v, 24, 126–127.

<sup>5</sup> Charles W. Johnson, “The Army, the Negro and the Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933–1942,” *Military Affairs* 36 (October 1972): 82.

work organization.<sup>6</sup> The CCC bore President Roosevelt's personal stamp of approval and support. However, there is no evidence that the CCC brought about a significant measure of positive change in race relations, nor does it suggest that the CCC was devoid of issues pertaining to segregation and racial discrimination.

Senior leadership of the Civil Conservation Corps limited black enrollment through the use of a quota system, which furthered racial discrimination and restrictions upon the program's supervisory positions. This abuse of official procedure occurred in some areas of the North but predominated in the South. Complaints regarding the CCC's selection process filtered up to black leaders, who addressed officials in the Department of Labor. As a result, the CCC Director of Selection, W. Frank Persons, took action against racial discrimination by local CCC selection representatives, "firmly believing it contrary to the intent and letter of the CCC Act." Persons applied steady pressure on officials in Washington and the Department of Labor, and threatened to withhold funding for future CCC projects in Army Corps areas located in the southeast United States. Persons's threat had an immediate impact on black enrollment as it increased throughout the CCC, specifically in the South.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Civilian Conservation Corps, *Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1942). From 1933–1942, the Civilian Conservation Corps was the largest and most productive single conservation effort ever undertaken in the United States. See Cole, *The African-American Experience in the Civilian Conservation Corps*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ann Burkly, "Blacks in the Civilian Conservation Corps: Successful Despite Discrimination," *Proceedings and Papers of the Georgia Association of Historians* 14 (Fall 1993): 38; John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1942: A New Deal Case Study* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1967), 85, 88–101.

From 1933 through 1942, influential black leadership and officials in the War Department addressed the issue of black officers in the Civilian Conservation Corps with CCC administrators. Robert Fechner, director of the CCC, discussed supervisory positions for African Americans in the CCC with the program's council, and decided that few blacks were capable of holding supervisory positions. Not surprisingly, in 1933, Fechner and the council took no further action regarding the subject.<sup>8</sup>

During the spring of 1935, the Secretary Treasurer of Howard University, Emmett J. Scott, who had held the official post of Special Assistant to the Secretary of War during World War I, appealed to President Roosevelt for executive action to force the War Department to appoint black infantry and medical corps reserve officers to the Civilian Conservation Corps—but the War Department was unresponsive to pressure from civil rights or other interested groups. Sensitive to potential political repercussions should the discrimination continue, Scott warned Roosevelt that pressure from the black newspapers would only increase and call attention to the fact that African Americans did not hold leadership positions in the CCC.<sup>9</sup>

Refusing to deviate from entrenched segregationist policies, the War Department ignored such outside pressures to change its position concerning African American officers. However, the War Department was susceptible to pressure from the president; only Roosevelt was in a position to force a change in policy. In late July 1935, FDR told

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<sup>8</sup> Johnson, "The Army, the Negro and the Civilian Conservation Corps," 84.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 85; Calvin W. Gower, "The Struggle for Blacks for Leadership Positions in the Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933–1942," *Journal of Negro History* 61 (April 1976): 127–131; Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1942*, 94–100, 189–190.

Fechner that he wanted the Army to begin, in a small way, to call Negro reserve medical and chaplains corps officers to duty in the Civilian Conservation Corps. By August 1936, a presidential election year, Roosevelt ordered the establishment of the first CCC camp to be officered entirely by African Americans in the Third Corps Area (Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia). By 1937 a second all-Negro CCC camp had been established in Elmira, New York, as a result of Roosevelt's continued pressure on the War Department to place blacks in commissioned officers' uniforms as well as to assign CCC leadership billets to existing African American officers.<sup>10</sup>

In evaluating the role of African Americans who participated in the Civilian Conservation Corps, the U.S. Army model for the program illustrates the measures and executive activity that, if handled well, could have been used as a template for all branches of the military during World War II. Examples such as W. Frank Persons's threat to withhold funding for Army Corps area projects was a simple act that made officials in Washington respond in a manner that enabled African Americans to participate in more leadership roles and supervisory positions. The pre-World War II model established by the CCC, under the stewardship of the Army, demonstrated progress, albeit only a crack, in opening the door toward total military integration. Similar to the Marine Corps, the Army remained grounded in its deep roots and

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<sup>10</sup> Ulysses G. Lee, Jr., *The Employment of Negro Troops* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2000), 36–39; Johnson, “The Army, the Negro and the Civilian Conservation Corps,” 86; Gower, “The Struggle for Blacks for Leadership Positions in the Civilian Conservation Corps,” 130–134; Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1942*, 98–101.

traditions that Negroes be led by white officers, which was reinforced by experiences during World War I. Whether or not reports of events from World War I accurately represented the actual wartime performance of blacks, conventional wisdom in the Army dictated that African American troops only performed well under the leadership of white officers.<sup>11</sup>

Charles Johnson argues that due to the increased need for junior officers in the expanding Regular Army, the War Department was willing, in late 1940—another presidential election year—for the first time, to consider training and appointing Negro enrollees as subalterns (junior officers in the Civilian Conservation Corps) and to consider appointing Negro reserve infantry officers to all-black CCC camps as vacancies occurred.<sup>12</sup> This token black representation in the Army was viewed as completely inadequate by vocal black leaders and activists of the black community because this

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<sup>11</sup> Lee, *Employment of Negro Troops*, 15–20. During World War I most African American soldiers were draftees, since few were allowed to enlist. Most blacks were assigned to traditional menial occupations in peripheral units such as supply, stevedore, engineer, and labor crews. Approximately 200,000 blacks soldiers served in France during the war, with eight out of ten black soldiers assigned to Service Support/Auxiliary units. The relatively small number who served in combat units were subjected to unusually harsh criticism. In one of the most publicized incidents, the 368th Regiment of the 92nd “Buffalo Soldier” Division allegedly became demoralized and fled to the rear during the Meuse-Argonne offensive in the fall of 1918. Many extenuating circumstances have been cited, such as inadequate training, inferior officers, and lack of firepower. See Lee Nichols, *Breakthrough on the Color Front* (New York: Random House, 1954), 33; Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: Black American Troops in World War I* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 111–136; Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 203; Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts, 1939–1953* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 21.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, “The Army, the Negro and the Civilian Conservation Corps,” 86; Lee, *Employment of Negro Troops*, 179–204.



decision did not signify a major shift in the Army's overall policy regarding African Americans. However, with Roosevelt's approval, Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson set forth the War Department's general policy towards blacks in the Regular Army, the Organized Reserve Corps, and the National Guard.<sup>13</sup>

In May 1943, the only document the USMC issued regarding its general policy towards blacks was the Letter of Instruction No. 421, classified as CONFIDENTIAL, to all Marine commanders.<sup>14</sup> Since the admission of African Americans into the Marine Corps was such a radical departure and foreign concept to many white Marines, this letter of instruction provided biased information and guidance on how to manage black Marines, according to a prejudiced and racially motivated commander. The most important item that General Thomas Holcomb addressed in the letter was the basic rule of racial etiquette at Camp Montford Point, which remained inflexible: "At no time was a black man to be in a position to give orders to white Marines." Not a single black Marine ever saw the letter or knew of its existence during World War II. The American public did not learn of the existence of Letter of Instruction No. 421 until 1946.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Johnson, "The Army, the Negro and the Civilian Conservation Corps," 86; Lee, *Employment of Negro Troops*, 179–204; Richard M. Dalfiume, "Military Segregation and the 1940 Presidential Election," *Phylon* 30 (January 1969): 49–50.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from the Commandant, U.S. Marine Corps, to Distribution List, dated March 20, 1943, Subject: Colored Personnel (formerly classified CONFIDENTIAL), Record Group 127: Records of the United States Marine Corps (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration). See also Appendix C.

<sup>15</sup> Holcomb quoted in Ronald K. Culp, *The First Black United States Marines: The Men of Montford Point, 1942–1946* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007), 86–87. See also Melton A. McLaurin, *The Marines of Montford Point: America's First Black Marines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 6–7.

While blacks had become officers in the U.S. Army, Navy, and Coast Guard before the close of World War II, not one black Marine had achieved commissioned status. By 1944, twelve African Americans among a group of thirteen, including one warrant officer, earned commissions in the U.S. Navy, a group known as the Golden Thirteen. In this same year, two African Americans earned commissions in the U.S. Coast Guard. In the Army, blacks had earned commissions since the late nineteenth century, and many officers—fighter pilots—were commissioned in the U.S. Army Air Force during the 1940s.<sup>16</sup> Notable Army officers include Henry Ossian Flipper, the first African American graduate of the United States Military Academy in 1877; Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., America’s first black general, and his son, Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., the first commander of the first all-black Army Air Corps unit, the 99th Pursuit Squadron, and the first African American general in the U.S. Air Force.<sup>17</sup> These men are representative of the strides the U.S. Army made in commissioning blacks for more than 80 years. Several Army units only had token representation of African Americans, and though the

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<sup>16</sup> Judson L. Jeffries, “The Marine Corps’ First Black Commissioned Officer: The Life and Legacy of Frederick C. Branch,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 87 (October 2010): 388. For information pertaining to success in administering the sensitive “Negro Problem” in the U.S. Navy, see Julius A. Furer, *Administration of the Navy Department in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1959), 307–309.

<sup>17</sup> Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper, *The Colored Cadet at West Point: Autobiography of Lieut. Henry Ossian Flipper, U.S.A., First Graduate of Color from the U.S. Military Academy* (New York: Homer Lee & Co., 1878); Marvin E. Fletcher, *America’s First Black General: Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., 1880–1970* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1989); Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. was also a graduate of the United States Military Academy (West Point), see Paul Silberman, *Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. Collection* (Washington, D.C.: National Air And Space Museum, Archive Division, 2003); Gerald W. Patton, *War and Race: The Black Officer in the American Military, 1915–1941* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 3–13.

Army was reluctant, it demonstrated that changes in racial policy did take effect. Between 1941 and 1943, the “race question” was one of the main policy issues of the War Department; this was to ensure that African Americans represented approximately 10 percent of the Army. The trend moved toward achieving the same percentage that blacks composed among the general population—a goal that was never reached.<sup>18</sup>

As with the Marine Corps, the Army’s organizational structure and racial policy was based on segregation. Since segregation was part of civilian life in the United States, the Army believed that it should mirror this fixed element within the military establishment as well. Not willing to step beyond the significant fact of having African Americans in U.S. military units, the Army and the Marine Corps took the position that the military should not be a laboratory for social experimentation, believing that integration would limit unit efficiency and create unnecessary racial friction.<sup>19</sup> Historian

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<sup>18</sup> By 1945, African Americans represented less than five percent of the U.S. Armed Forces. See Martin Binkin, Mark J. Eitelberg, Alvin J. Schexnider, and Marvin M. Smith, *Blacks in the Military: Studies in Defense Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1982), 19, 24–25; Lee, *Employment of Negro Troops*, 36–39, 703–704. “The persistent legacy” as it came before the War Department in 1940 was a complex mixture of facts and attitudes. In fact, most white Americans would not sanction the intermixture of whites and blacks in the intimate association of military life, and it was equally a fact that segregation was repellent among most educated blacks and the rank and file. It was a final fact that segregation was the tradition of the Army, and, in one form or another, of most of civilian America. Segregation was the nation’s *modus vivendi*, and the Army followed it, except in its Officer Candidate Schools. See Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), 461–464.

<sup>19</sup> Alan M. Osur, *Blacks in the Army Air Forces During World War II: The Problems of Race Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, United States Air Force, 1986), 2–8; Binkin, Eitelberg, Schexnider, and Smith, *Blacks in the Military*, 19; Lee, *Employment of Negro Troops*, 36–39. See also Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1967), 262.

Richard Dalfiume argues that the U.S. Army had since 1863 functioned with a *separate but equal* policy, and believed it had made a major concession to African American opinion in 1940 when it promised that blacks would serve in all of its branches. Furthermore, the Army was of the opinion that segregation did not lead to racial discrimination against black soldiers. However, as African American Marines and soldiers continued to participate in the war effort, “they became more convinced that segregation inevitably led to racial discrimination.”<sup>20</sup> The experiences of blacks in the armed forces confirmed much of their thinking throughout World War II.

During the World War II era, neither the War Department nor the Navy Department could legally exercise jurisdiction over the other. Moreover, despite working closely in the defense organization, the Navy Department consistently followed its own structural standard and usually took issue with War Department plans regarding World War II force structure. Nevertheless, the War Department’s examples in dealing with racial policies and practices, as well as its task organization of African Americans, demonstrated that the military services could create programs to better educate its members on the social and military significance of assimilating minorities. In contrast to the Navy Department, the War Department offered minorities greater opportunities for advancement and representation.<sup>21</sup>

In November 1940, during the Hampton Conference on National Defense, Colonel West A. Hamilton, an African American Army infantry reservist, gave a speech

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<sup>20</sup> Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the Armed Forces*, 45.

<sup>21</sup> Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the Armed Forces*, 8–9, 11, 13, 22–24, 28–30, 35–41, 45–51, 58–59, 69, 74–79, 82–88, 90–103, 124, 143, 148–153.

entitled “The Negroes’ Historical and Contemporary role in National Defense.” In his speech, Hamilton addressed the fine heritage and wartime participation of blacks in military campaigns (for instance, the French and Indian Wars, Revolutionary War, War of 1812, U.S. Civil War, Spanish-American War, and World War I). Regarding black soldiers in the Army, Hamilton asserted, “We do have a small but fine representation in the armed forces, particularly the army. We have a fine upstanding reservoir of manpower in the form of Negro youth, willing and anxious to serve. It is my considered judgment that we should join hands in exploiting and utilizing to the utmost limit what we have in the way of army personnel and leadership, trained and potential; that we should hasten in every way possible the development of military-minded intelligent young men ready to accept such training as will enable them to accept the responsibilities when offered and to discharge them with honor and credit.”<sup>22</sup>

In 1940, an African American representative such as Hamilton was unknown in the Navy Department and the Marines; additionally, Hamilton’s rhetoric and what he advocated never appeared in any official Marine Corps publications. During this period, African American soldiers had a voice among the officer ranks to push and fight for their cause. This type of African American representation gave the Army a considerable head start in addressing ways to better assimilate blacks to fully participate in World War II.

In December 1940, William H. Hastie, the civilian aide to the Secretary of War,

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<sup>22</sup> West A. Hamilton, “The Negroes’ Historical and Contemporary Role in National Defense,” Record Group 220: Records of the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces (College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).

met with Roosevelt's unofficial "black cabinet" and nongovernmental black leadership. During this meeting the group discussed necessary strategies for the complete integration of African Americans into the military and defense programs. All the members agreed that the time was right to eliminate racism in the armed forces. Hastie urged Walter White, Executive Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and A. Philip Randolph, Executive Secretary of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids, to stress three major points during their meetings with Roosevelt: (1) that blacks vigorously opposed segregated army units; (2) that some whites supported this opposition; and (3) that the Army was not, as Congress had mandated in 1940, training blacks for the Army Air Corps.<sup>23</sup>

While influential black leaders never relinquished their demand for a fully integrated Army, historians Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty emphasize that William Hastie was more immediately concerned with the practical problem of guaranteeing the assimilation and fair employment of thousands of new African American recruits. Hastie was frustrated by the discrimination attendant in a segregated military establishment, most notably by the Department of the Army's failure to open combat occupation specialties to blacks. MacGregor and Nalty further emphasize that

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<sup>23</sup> Letter from William Hastie to Walter White, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, December 21, 1940, NAACP Papers, pt. 9, reel 1 [University Publications of America microfilm collection]. Group II, Series A, General Office File. Part 15: Segregation and Discrimination, Complaints and Responses, 1940–1955, Series B: Administrative Files (Washington, D.C.: Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress). See also Walter F. White, *A Man Called White* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 220–223, 342; Philip McGuire, "Judge Hastie, World War II, and Army Racism," *Journal of Negro History* 62 (October 1977): 353.

Hastie was also deeply concerned with the Army's failure to procure and train a sufficient number of African American officer candidates for military service.<sup>24</sup> Measures to eliminate racism in the armed forces took center stage for Hastie, who further stressed to White and Randolph the imperative to raise other matters with FDR. These matters included whether all-black units would be officered by whites; whether military facilities would be integrated; and whether the War Department would make sincere efforts to prevent racial discrimination. In all these matters, Hastie's desire was that White and Randolph convey to Roosevelt the idea that the black community was diametrically opposed to Army racism and the prejudicial attitude of the federal government toward African American service members.<sup>25</sup>

Based upon these priorities, during his first three months in office, Hastie reviewed Army policies relating to African American soldiers, the manner in which they were employed and organized, and how to increase the visibility of black personnel in all branches of the armed forces. In 1941, Hastie submitted, "Survey and Recommendations Concerning the Integration of the Negro Soldier into the Army" to the Secretary of War. In his survey and recommendations, Hastie advocated the development of: (1) A detailed plan to accomplish the progressive utilization of Negro officers in wartime arms and services; (2) A correlative plan to assure the selection of sufficient Negro officer candidates for training in the established Officer Candidate Schools; as well as (3) The

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<sup>24</sup> Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces: Basic Documents V*, Black Soldiers in World War II (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1977), 41.

<sup>25</sup> McGuire, "Judge Hastie, World War II, and Army Racism," 353.

assignment of Negro junior officers then available in the Reserve Reception Centers, Replacement Training Centers, the command of small detached units, and to perform morale functions; and the integration of (4) Negro flying and non-flying personnel for Air Corps combat forces to be trained at installations other than the limited facilities at Tuskegee in order to significantly increase the number of airmen and thereby alleviate manpower shortages.<sup>26</sup>

Before resigning his position as the civilian aide to the Secretary of War in 1943, Hastie's primary objective was to push legislation regarding the utilization of African Americans as commissioned officers in the Army, and he succeeded. An additional objective of Hastie's, which he achieved, was to increase the presence of blacks in the Army Air Forces (AAF) by creating all-black fighter squadrons.<sup>27</sup> By March 1943, the

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<sup>26</sup> Memorandum from William Hastie to Robert Patterson, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, February 7, 1941, Record Group 220: Records of the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces (College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration); Letter from William Hastie to Henry Stimson, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, September 22, 1941, Record Group 220: Records of the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces (College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).

<sup>27</sup> In the 1930s, the rejection of blacks by the Air Corps remained an institutionalized practice as black applicants, time after time, received the standard reply that "there are no organizations in the Army Air Corps made up of colored men and none are contemplated." Until 1939 the Air Corps had succeeded in excluding blacks; however, black and white leaders and organizations were no longer willing to accept such racist practices and challenged this policy of exclusion. Intense political pressure was applied to Congress, the President, Secretary of War, and the War Department, and through them, upon the Air Corps. Gradually the Air Corps altered its policies, backed down, and admitted blacks. See Osur, *Blacks in the Army Air Forces During World War II*, 21–31; Memorandum from Acting Civilian Aide to the Secretary Truman Gibson to Special Assistant to the Secretary of War Charles Poletti, March 22, 1943, Record Group 220: Records of the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed



Army Air Forces had established an all-black fighter squadron (the 99th Pursuit Squadron, part of the 332nd Fighter Group); additionally, the War Department had an Advisory Committee on Negro Troop Policies, which addressed issues related to the treatment of blacks in the Army. In contrast, during this same period, the Marine Corps had just allowed blacks to become non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and serve as drill instructors at Montford Point. Training for black Marines centered more on service support and auxiliary assignments, whereas the Tuskegee Airmen were being trained exclusively as combat fighter pilots, aircraft armorers, mechanics and aviation support technicians.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout the first six months that African Americans served in the Marine Corps, the focus of attention was on the 51st Composite Defense Battalion. It was to be “the first (and for a time, the only) black combat unit.” However, during the battalion’s initial stages of training, equipment shortages and the men’s complete unfamiliarity with

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Forces (College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration); Lerone Bennett, Jr., “William H. Hastie set New Standard by Resigning Top-Level Post to Protest Racism,” *Ebony Magazine* 54 (August 2001): 96–100. Hastie served as the Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War from October 25, 1940–July 31, 1943.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Robert Patterson to Wilbur La Roe, Jr., Undersecretary of War, March 26, 1943, Record Group 220: Records of the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces (College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration); Letter from James A. Ulio to John J. McCloy, the Adjutant General, August 27, 1942, Record Group 220: Records of the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces (College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration). See also William A. Percy, “Jim Crow and Uncle Sam: The Tuskegee Flying Units and the U.S. Army Air Forces in Europe During World War II,” *Journal of Military History* 67 (July 2003): 773–776; “First Class of Colored Aviation Cadets Begins Pilot Training on July 19, 1941,” in MacGregor and Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces* V, 51–54; David F. Winkler, “The Montford Point Marines,” *Seapower* 54 (September 2011): 60.

the weapons systems and supporting equipment stifled the unit's pre-deployment training program. Despite having numerous trained and qualified white instructors and officers, the unit's biggest shortfall was its progress in training.<sup>29</sup>

Notwithstanding, Lieutenant Colonel Floyd A. Stephenson, Colonel Woods's executive officer, who later became the commanding officer of the 51st, discovered that blacks could learn to perform all the duties within a defense battalion. An experienced artillery officer, and Texas native, Stephenson was a product of a segregated society; nevertheless, he approached his new assignment with enthusiasm and considerable drive. Stephenson recommended to Colonel Woods that the defense battalion become a "regular" unit, and was fully convinced that blacks could be forged into first-class warfighters. But on June 7, 1943, and despite Stephenson's endorsement, the Marine Corps removed the "Composite" designation of the 51st Defense Battalion and shifted the emphasis of the unit's mission.<sup>30</sup>

Initially the 51st was designed to repulse amphibious landings, however, according to the Marine Corps, this requirement was no longer imperative. By the time the unit deployed to the Ellice Islands in 1944, the battalion's new mission became defending against Japanese air strikes and hit-and-run raids by warships. In addition, as World War II progressed and battalion commanders changed within the 51st, rather than being employed for their tactical capabilities, African Americans found themselves on

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<sup>29</sup> Henry I. Shaw, Jr. and Ralph W. Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1975), 15–19; Bernard C. Nalty, *The Right to Fight: African-American Marines in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1994), 11.

<sup>30</sup> Shaw and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 15–19; Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 11.

the peripheries of the action, relegated to garrison and training assignments for the remainder of the war.<sup>31</sup>

In every respect the Marines of Montford Point and the Tuskegee Airmen, were the first African Americans in their respective service branches, but the opportunities available to each group greatly differed.<sup>32</sup> Even with the restrictive racial policies within the military there were more opportunities during World War II for African American men to be commissioned as officers than there were during World War I. The *Pittsburgh Courier* released an article on June 18, 1942 pertaining to the new racial policies for the 93rd Infantry Division: “When the 93rd goes into action it will carry a living symbol of American democracy in action. From present indications, both colored and white officers will lead this combat unit—a distinct departure from the military policy of World War I. It is not expedient at this time to have the entire division staffed by colored officers. Colored officers, fresh from training, are arriving daily and are taking their assigned places, ready to take and give commands that will help these Tan Yanks keep that rendezvous with destiny.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid; Winkler, “The Montford Point Marines,” 60.

<sup>32</sup> Although segregated and separated from whites, the airmen were organized and employed in standard units with black commissioned and non-commissioned officers. Moreover, the “Tuskegee Experiment” provides an example of how the Marine Corps could have called upon this pattern for commissioning blacks. The Army Air Corps (AAC) allowed for the Tuskegee Experiment to run its course, even though many officers hoped that it would fail; nevertheless, it ran its course and yielded astounding results.

<sup>33</sup> “93rd [Infantry] To Be Commanded By Both Colored And White Officers,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 18, 1942. See also Maggi M. Morehouse, *Fighting in the Jim Crow Army: Black Men and Women Remember World War II* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 27–28.

The 93rd Infantry Division, like the Marines of Montford Point and the Tuskegee Airmen, were segregated and trained separately from whites as they prepared for combat in the South Pacific.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the Army permitted blacks to serve as commissioned officers in the 93rd. The soldiers of the 93rd were trained as “combat” infantrymen and employed as such during the war; whereas, the 51st and 52nd Defense Battalions of Montford Point were organized and equipped as “combat” units, but employed solely as service support/auxiliary units. The Marine Corps’s notion that African Americans were incapable of serving as infantrymen during World War II stemmed from insufficient pre-deployment combat training for blacks; however, the push for more black infantry representation in the Army came to a point in 1944. As head of the War Department’s Committee on Negro Troop Policy, on March 2, 1944, Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy signed a statement to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson advising that,<sup>35</sup> “It is the feeling of the Committee that colored units should

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<sup>34</sup> Robert F. Jefferson, *Fighting for Hope: African American Troops of the 93rd Infantry Division in World War II and Postwar America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 121–135.

<sup>35</sup> In 1942, according to Henry Stimson, each man came into contact with “the Negro problem” with his own deep-set beliefs. Stimson’s convictions were those of a northern conservative born in the abolitionist tradition. He believed in full freedom, political and economic, for all men of all colors; at the time, he did not believe in the desirability of social intermixture. However, these two views were inconsistent, he believed, only in the opinion of those who *desired* them to be inconsistent. In Stimson’s opinion, the man who would “keep the nigger in his place” and the man who wished to jump in one bound from complex reality to unattainable Utopia were the twin devils of the situation—he struggled with both. See Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War*, 461–464. In the same year, Secretary of the Navy William Frank Knox was forced to deal with accepting blacks in limited numbers into the Navy for newly established segregated units, thus adopting the Army’s basic racial policy. See “A New Policy,” in Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the United States*

be introduced in combat at the earliest practical moment, we must be more affirmative about the use of our negro troops.”<sup>36</sup>

One reason for this push could have resulted from a memorandum sent to John McCloy on November 3, 1943, from the civilian aide to the Secretary of War, Truman K. Gibson, Jr., in which he stated: “The film, *The Negro Soldier* [1944] should, in my opinion, be released publicly as soon as revisions have been completed. This film will do much to extend the public appreciation for the Negro soldier.”<sup>37</sup> According to historians

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*Armed Forces: Basic Documents* VI, Blacks in the World War II Naval Establishment (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1977), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from John McCloy to Henry Stimson, Assistant Secretary of War, March 2, 1944, Record Group 220: Records of the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces (College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration); McCloy quoted in Gerald Astor, *The Right to Fight: A History of African Americans in the Military* (New York: Presidio Press, 2001), 239. As the war dragged on and racial unrest deepened, Stimson turned to the Advisory Committee on Negro Affairs and continued to suggest changes in his department’s racial practices. Under the leadership of McCloy, the committee quickly assumed responsibility for the organization and assignment of African American units. McCloy worked effectively with the new civilian aide to the Secretary of War, Truman K. Gibson, Jr. to remedy the plight of African Americans. The committee also became increasingly concerned with the social problems involved in the development of a large segregated military force. McCloy and Gibson urged the Army to make better use of the thousands of African American soldiers whose potential was being wasted in segregated units. As a result of the committee’s efforts, black infantry divisions and numerous other black units were dispatched to combat zones in the South Pacific. The committee’s efforts also provided some of the smaller black combat units the opportunity to fight with distinction; nevertheless, most African Americans found themselves involved in undistinguished, though often important, service occupations miles behind friendly lines. See “Piecemeal Reforms,” in MacGregor and Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces* V, 245; Lee, *Employment of Negro Troops*, 111–135.

<sup>37</sup> See “Memorandum from the Civilian Aide to the Secretary Truman K. Gibson, Jr. to the Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, dated November 3, 1943,” in MacGregor and Nalty, *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces* V, 288–290. See also *The Negro Soldier*, directed by

Thomas Cripps and David Culbert, the U.S. Army's First Motion Picture Unit released this film in January 1944 and used director Stuart Heisler's documentary as a means of propaganda to convince blacks to enlist in the Army. Most Americans regarded the film highly, while some even claimed that *The Negro Soldier* was "one of the finest things that ever happened to America." Due to the film's success, *The Negro Soldier* became a model for filmmakers, and proved to be a breakout film that positively influenced many Americans, both black and white. *The Negro Soldier* also influenced future African American films and their viewers in a variety of ways. It represented a watershed in the use of film to encourage racial tolerance in three areas: promotion, production, and the demise of "race films."<sup>38</sup>

*The Negro Soldier* was the only wartime film that attempted to weave blacks into the fabric of American life, while the Marine Corps neglected to adopt this theme in its dealings with African Americans. For example, instead of showing images of slavery and stereotypes, Heisler's film showed blacks as lawyers, musicians, and other valued professionals. In different movies during this time period, African Americans were typically portrayed as funny characters that played out perceived racial stereotypes. However, after *The Negro Soldier*, blacks not only played more respectable and prominent roles in films, the film showed that African Americans played a highly creditable role in securing America's freedoms and values overseas. Furthermore, people

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Stuart Heisler (1944, U.S. War Department), Record Group 111: Records of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer (College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Cripps and David Culbert, "The Negro Soldier (1944): Film Propaganda in Black and White," *American Quarterly* 31 (Winter 1979): 637-640.

came to realize the importance and influence of films as a tool for social change. The message within *The Negro Soldier* solidified the notion and provided visual proof that racial equality was a justified concept and should be accepted.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the success and the support for *The Negro Soldier*, the Advisory Committee believed that it was powerless to successfully strike at Jim Crow in America. The members of the committee were convinced that much of the Army's racial problems centered on white leadership in black units. McCloy and Gibson worked to obtain and commission more African American officers and to improve the quality of white officers assigned to black units. The committee also instituted an Army-wide educational program covering the command and leadership of black troops. The 18-page pamphlet, *Command of Negro Troops* (1944) and the 101-page Army Service Forces Manual, *Leadership and the Negro Soldier* (1944) were two significant examples of this educational initiative.<sup>40</sup>

In 1944, there existed no similar documents in the Marine Corps; and although the members of the Army's Advisory Committee on Negro Troop Policy could not directly influence institutionalized racism, the Navy Department could have looked to the examples set by the Army and the Air Corps and worked with the War Department to create a uniformed guide or manual of instruction regarding the command, training, and employment of African American Marines. As the Army proved the need for

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 616–640.

<sup>40</sup> See “Piecemeal Reforms,” *Command of Negro Troops*, and *Leadership and the Negro Soldier*, in MacGregor and Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces V*, 245, 307–325, 343–450.

combat integration, the Marine Corps figured out ways not to have black infantry. In 1944, when *The Negro Soldier* was showing in American theaters, the Marine 51st Defense Battalion was preparing to deploy to the Pacific Theater. This pre-deployment phase of the battalion's training program would have been a prime opportunity for the USMC to adopt elements of the Army's educational initiative, and follow its example in being more affirmative about the use of black Marines in combat units.

While the Army continued to out pace the Marine Corps in race relations, improving military efficiency among all its soldiers by publishing doctrine to address and manage the "race question," the Marines continued to prove that segregation and racial discrimination was more of a detriment than an asset. In July 1944, the Marine Corps's persistent neglect of adequate combat training for African American Marines drew public scrutiny. In a "Marines Combat Report," *Time Magazine* emphasized that the Corps still had no black officers. Combat correspondent Robert Sherrod reported that the conduct of black Marines under fire, for the first time, during the battle of Saipan rated a universal 4.0 (the Annapolis mark of perfection). Sherrod described an incident involving a black Marine named Jenkins sharing a foxhole, under fire, with a wounded white Marine. According to Sherrod's article, the white Marine handed a grenade to Jenkins who said, "I don't know how to use this thing." After a quick tutorial, Jenkins threw the grenade, killing three Japanese and destroying an enemy machine gun position.<sup>41</sup> Upon reading Sherrod's article, the black press castigated the Marine Corps for placing "service support/auxiliary" Marines in battle with inadequate training on one

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Sherrod, "Army & Navy – MARINES, AIR, COMMAND: Combat Report" *Time Magazine* 45 (July 24, 1944): 59.



of the most basic weapons of combat, the hand grenade.<sup>42</sup> On August 19, 1944, the Marine Corps had 18,000 black Marines, yet none were commissioned officers.

Beginning in 1942, the Navy Department and the Marine Corps were reluctant to place blacks in combat units for fear of their supposed ineffectiveness; nevertheless, they recognized the right for blacks to fight and even acknowledged that blacks had some technical skills. In doing so, the Marine Corps carefully screened and matched African American recruits with selected white officers and NCOs. This careful screening and selection process that the Marines implemented could have also been used to evaluate and select blacks to attend Officer Candidate School (OCS). Furthermore, Headquarters Marine Corps had proclaimed that the Corps's first black unit had become a success by using this procedure for screening and selection.<sup>43</sup> This evidence demonstrates that the time spent screening white Marine officers and NCOs could have been spent screening the performance of black Marines with leadership potential, as was conducted to select black NCOs to serve as drill instructors. Even so, in stark contrast to the War Department and the Tuskegee Experiment, the Navy Department failed to create a similar program for black Marines to prove to the Corps's general leadership that they were prepared to assume greater positions of responsibility and serve as commissioned officers.

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<sup>42</sup> "Suggestion for the Next Broadcast," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 19, 1944; "Mr. President, What of the Marines?" *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 19, 1944; "Not One Officer in Marines," *Philadelphia Afro-American*, August 19, 1944. See also Culp, *First Black United States Marines*, 170–171.

<sup>43</sup> Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 374–375. See also Shaw and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 1–46.

Although the Army had made great strides in commissioning blacks as opposed to the Marine Corps, there were still issues with segregation and racial discrimination. However, the War Department saw to it that the Advisory Committee on Negro Troop Policies addressed such issues. From February 1942 through May 1943, the War Department issued five letters regarding its policy on the treatment of Negro personnel in the Army.<sup>44</sup> Conversely, African American Marines did not receive corresponding treatment from the Navy Department, elucidating the depth and longevity of the Marine Corps's discriminatory practices and efforts to marginalize them.

The Marine Corps held fast to its segregationist policies without fear of punishment from the White House or any other entity of the executive branch. It is unclear if the USMC was provided a longer period of adjustment considering that it had not officially permitted blacks for 144 years, or if the adjustment from *exclusion* to *segregation* was too much for such a small military organization to overcome. Regardless, the president and the secretary of the navy could have directed the Marines to follow the example of the Army. Even a token program would have been better than no steps toward commissioning African Americans. As Turner Blount summarized after General Henry L. Larsen's speech in 1943: "The top [Marines], the whites, didn't want you." It was not until October 1943 that the black press began to raise the issue of black

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<sup>44</sup> Memorandum from J. B. Leonard to the Assistant Secretary of War, Treatment of Negro Personnel, May 25, 1943, Record Group 220: Records of the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces (College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).

officers in the Marine Corps.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the honorable character of service that black Marines demonstrated in 1944, the door still remained closed to OCS. Private Joseph Myers described what occurred after leaving Montford Point: “Well, I thought I was going to Officer Candidate School. But I didn’t go. See, Colonel Woods was trying to get me in the Officer Candidate School. They had a look [and] they said it was full. And they were in need; they killed so many of the white Marines there was a need of Marines to replace [them]. So, they began to send the black Marines over to replace them over at Guadalcanal. Wake Island. Palau. The Marianas. And I went to Guam. From Guam I went to Iwo Jima.”<sup>46</sup> A year after completing boot camp in 1943, Private First Class (PFC) Frederick Branch—later to become the Marine Corps’s first black commissioned officer—inquired about OCS and was rebuffed. Branch stated, “They told me to shut that blankety-blank stuff up about being an officer, you ain’t going to be no officer.”<sup>47</sup>

Since the USMC established its own racial policies concerning African Americans, it was not obligated to follow the commissioning practices of the Army and

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<sup>45</sup> “Suggestion for the Next Broadcast,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 19, 1944; “Mr. President, What of the Marines?” *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 19, 1944; “Not One Officer in Marines,” *Philadelphia Afro-American*, August 19, 1944. See also Turner Blount, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, Blount, July 21, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Blount\\_Turner.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Blount_Turner.html) (hereafter cited as Blount interview).

<sup>46</sup> Joseph Myers, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin, June 29, 2005, [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Myers\\_Joseph.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Myers_Joseph.html) (hereafter cited as Myers interview).

<sup>47</sup> Branch quoted in Mike Burton, “A Few Good Men,” *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine* (July 1995): 17.

the Navy. According to Marine Corps leaders, the “race question” was a national and controversial issue that had to be evaded. In addition, the Marines justified their embedded segregationist policies by accusing politicians for appeasing the black press at the expense of military service needs, and declared that until someone at a “higher level” resolved the issue, the services were not required to go any further in solving the race question. In other words, the Marine Corps’s stance to activists and reformers concerning the progression of blacks became: *this is your problem, you created it, now fix it.*<sup>48</sup>

Notwithstanding, in March 1943, acting commandant of the Marine Corps, Major General Harry Schmidt explained that black non-commissioned officers were necessary because in the “Army’s” experience, in nearly all cases, to intermingle the races in the same organization led to “trouble and disorder.” Demonstrating his own and the Marine Corps’s lack of experience with African Americans, General Schmidt provided his commanders with dubious advice based on what he perceived as the “Army’s” experience: Black Marines should be assigned duties and be commanded by white men who understand and have a thorough knowledge of blacks’ individual and racial characteristics and temperaments.<sup>49</sup>

From 1942 to 1944 the Marine Corps’s number of African American recruits swelled. Seventy-five percent of them were college graduates, specialized technicians,

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<sup>48</sup> Shaw and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 49; see also Culp, *First Black United States Marines*, 227.

<sup>49</sup> Morris J. MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces, 1940–1965* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1981), 104–105.

teachers, and Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) graduates.<sup>50</sup> During the war more than 12,000 black Marines deployed overseas in defense battalions, combat service support units, and ammunition and depot companies but were afforded few opportunities for advancement, despite their important wartime contributions. Furthermore, the highest rank held by a black Marine in June 1944 was First Sergeant.<sup>51</sup>

On June 30, 1944, there were 698,911 African Americans serving in the U.S. Army. In the infantry, 44,869; coast and field artillery, 38,517; cavalry, 1,473; engineers, 128,789; air corps, 79,027; and other branches, 406,236. Of the 5,957 African American Army officers, 102 were dental corps officers, 213 nurses, 508 were other medical corps officers, and 239 were chaplains. African American soldiers serving overseas totaled 361,459. The highest-ranking African American officers held the ranks of brigadier general, colonel, and lieutenant colonel.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, during World War II, the military population of the Marine Corps was less than 200,000, which speaks to a few of the limitations the Marines had to deal with regarding the task organization and combat employment of African Americans. Notwithstanding, the Corps failed to commission blacks and place them in any of its black units, much less create a provisional all-black Marine infantry unit.

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<sup>50</sup> Gail Buckley, *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm* (New York: Random House, 2001), 278; Bernard C. Nalty, *The Right to Fight: African-American Marines in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1994), 9.

<sup>51</sup> Jeffries, "The Marine Corps' First Black Commissioned Officer," 387.

<sup>52</sup> Memorandum, Negroes in the Armed Forces; White House File, Philleo Nash Papers, 1945, Record Group 228: Records of the Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1940–1946 (College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).

In spite of racial discrimination and prejudice, the Tuskegee Airmen amassed a distinguished and impressive flying record. They flew more than 15,500 sorties and completed 1,578 missions. The unit received the Distinguished Unit Citation, the highest award for valor for an entire unit; members of the unit earned 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, a Legion of Merit, a Silver Star, 14 Bronze Stars, and 744 Air Medals. During its tour in the South Pacific, the 93rd Infantry Division also gained an impressive record. The unit and its members earned Battle Campaign Streamers for New Guinea, the Northern Solomon Islands, and Bismarck Archipelago; a Distinguished Service Cross, a Distinguished Service Medal, five Silver Stars, five Legions of Merit, 686 Bronze Stars, and 27 Air Medals.<sup>53</sup>

The record of combat service for the Marines of Montford Point stands in stark contrast to that of the Tuskegee Airmen and the 93rd Infantry Division, illustrating that the Marine Corps's segregationist policy and practices fixed African Americans in assignments that, for the most part, prevented these men from achieving a distinguished wartime record. Why would the Corps choose to risk remaining under fire by the media and jeopardizing its long-standing reputation as a fighting force by not experimenting with a black combat unit? One could conclude that the leaders of this former exclusively white organization thought that being all-white was part of what gave them the reputation of being elite, thus they did not "choose" to risk anything—they thought they were preserving their reputation; in addition, they could have refused to accept that black

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<sup>53</sup> Gerald Astor, *The Right to Fight: A History of African Americans in the Military* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 301; Bryan D. Booker, *African Americans in the United States Army in World War II* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 191.

wartime participation would be permanent, taking into account that this was such an abrupt change and departure from nearly 150 years of a fixed tradition.

Nevertheless, the War Department had established a precedent and platform for commissioning blacks in the Army. William Hastie made sure this pattern continued during his tenure as civilian aide to the Secretary of War. In addition, by 1942, as World War II gained momentum, the U.S. Army had provided several examples of fully functioning all-black technical and combat units. In the same year, and as a result of the Army's progress, General Holcomb declared, "The Negro race has every opportunity now to satisfy its aspiration for combat, in the Army—a very much larger organization than the Navy or Marine Corps—and their desire to enter the naval service is largely, I think, to break into a club that does not want them."<sup>54</sup> After listening to Holcomb's remarks, Secretary of the Navy William Frank Knox, a Republican from Illinois,<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Major General Thomas Holcomb's testimony during the hearings of the General Board of the United States Navy, dated January 23, 1942. Subject: "Enlistment of Men of Colored Race," Record Group 428: General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1941–2004 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration), 18. Holcomb also quoted in Jeffries, "The Marine Corps' First Black Commissioned Officer," 382. See also Letter from the Commandant, U.S. Marine Corps to District Commanders, All Reserve Districts except 10th, 14th, 15th, and 16th, dated May 25, 1942. Subject: Enlistment of Colored Personnel in the Marine Corps, Record Group 127: Records of the United States Marine Corps (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).

<sup>55</sup> Secretary Knox, who took office in 1940, followed the racial policy that had evolved within the Navy Department. He was a veteran of the Rough Riders and had seen the black troops of the 10th Cavalry in action, calling them "the bravest men he had ever seen." Knox suggested that African Americans could make their greatest contribution to national defense by enlisting in the Army's black regiments. On the other hand, Knox believed that quickly injecting African Americans into the overwhelmingly white Navy, except as cooks, messmen, or stevedores, would prove cruel rather than kind. Knox insisted that racial minorities would find

ordered the Marine Corps Commandant to carry out the president's orders, emphasizing that "the civilian who issued the directive to recruit blacks was the nation's commander-in-chief." In response to the president's mandate, Montford Point was built.<sup>56</sup> Where was this type of aggressive stance from the White House throughout the war? How did the commandant of the Marines Corps, who had distributed Letter of Instruction No. 421, continue to carry out segregationist practices and policies through the close of the war? One could argue that President Roosevelt's interest concerning the Marines appeared to have significantly waned after the Navy Department's May 20, 1942 press release, announcing the USMC's plans for recruiting blacks; furthermore, General Holcomb had the support of all the Marine Corps's brass.

If the Navy Department had sincerely wanted to create opportunities for blacks to serve as commissioned officers in the Marines and to receive more valuable leadership training, it could have appointed an influential civilian liaison to the Marine Corps.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the Navy Department could have, after initial recruit and secondary school

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themselves in a competitive situation in which they would certainly fail. See Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, 70, 185–193, 198.

<sup>56</sup> See Major General Thomas Holcomb's testimony during the hearings of the General Board of the United States Navy, dated January 23, 1942. Subject: "Enlistment of Men of Colored Race," Record Group 428: General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1941–2004 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration), 18. Holcomb and Knox quoted in Jeffries, "The Marine Corps' First Black Commissioned Officer," 382.

<sup>57</sup> On January 22, 1942, an influential civilian addressed a letter to Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, proposing that the Navy consider providing token enlistment for Negroes to neutralize the discontent that was evident in the black community. See "Letter from Gifford Pinchot to Secretary Frank Knox, Secretary of the Navy, January 22, 1942," in MacGregor and Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces VI*, 15–16. Efforts such as these easily could have been used for the Marine Corps to commission blacks.



training, assigned African Americans to a battalion located in the vastness of Camp Lejeune or Camp Pendleton, California, where, surrounded by regular (white) Marines, discipline would have been maintained for blacks. That the Navy Department did not choose to address this issue is clear evidence that the department decided it was preferable to use white officers to command black Marines. This was clearly institutional racism, camouflaged by appeals to maintain tradition, various civilian pressures, and received wisdom from influential hardline southern Democrats.<sup>58</sup>

The Marine Corps's segregationist policies and practices enabled racial discrimination; the Marines had opportunities to assimilate blacks like any other branch of service during the World War II. Nonetheless, the Corps's senior leadership showed no initiative in drawing more from its new pool of manpower. African Americans trained at a segregated facility, and by 1943, black Marines operated the camp, holding all organizational leadership positions with the exception of those assigned to commissioned officers. Montford Point was the perfect out-of-the-way location for the Marines to conduct a "Montford Point Experiment."

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<sup>58</sup> During the World War II era, examples of influential hardline southern Democrats are Robert C. Byrd (WV), James F. Byrnes (SC), and Frank Dixon (AL), who all held the color line and were staunch resisters of military integration. See Robert C. Byrd, *Robert C. Byrd: Child of the Appalachian Coal Fields* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2005), 41–55; Eric Pianin, "A Senator's Shame: Byrd in His New Book, Again Confronts Early Ties to KKK," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), June 19, 2005, A01; Christopher Manning, *William L. Dawson and the Limits of Black Electoral Leadership* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 92–118, 165, 167; Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932–1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 1–10, 23–27, 28–66.

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSIONS: A NEW TRADITION OF MILITARY SERVICE BEGINS

World War II *officially* marked the beginning of an African American tradition of service in the United States Marine Corps. For the first time in history, blacks were authorized to wear the uniform of the most racist branch of the military. Overnight, the Marine Corps reluctantly shifted from an exclusively white organization to one that was multi-racial but stringently segregated. Even with blacks among its ranks, the Corps made no attempt to genuinely welcome its colored brothers-in-arms.

This examination of the Marines of Montford Point has demonstrated that, upon entering the military, northern and southern African American Marine recruits entered the Marine Corps with varying notions of military life and degrees of knowledge concerning the history of the organization. For northerners, the *unofficial* rules of integration in the North meant life was fundamentally different from the legal system of discrimination in the American South.<sup>1</sup> Fundamental social differences such as these, as well as notions of equality and rights to citizenship, separated northern and southern black Marine recruits, despite the fact that white southerners—and most commissioned officers—viewed them all the same. For the men of Montford Point, simply serving in the Marine Corps's uniform in the 1940s was a drastic departure from previous U.S. military practices. Black Marines quickly learned that life in the South, but more importantly, service in the Marine Corps, was not going to be an easy route toward

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<sup>1</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, original publication, 1955; commemorative edition, 2002), 7.

greater opportunity.

In most instances when faced with Jim Crow, northern blacks chose to either passively accept southern racism and segregation or to respond aggressively and challenge the South's legal system of discrimination. For others, the choice was made for them upon arriving at the gates of Montford Point. Melton A. McLaurin's account, *The Marines of Montford Point: America's First Black Marines* (2007) chronicles the experiences of the first black Marines with the purpose of introducing and telling the story of these men anew. However, this thesis examines the fundamental differences between northern and southern black Marines' attitudes toward *official* Jim Crow laws and a segregationist Marine Corps at the time they arrived at Montford Point to begin training and the challenges they faced within the local southern communities. It explores the realities that black and white American society created about black Marines, emphasizes the significance of the draft, and the Marine Corps's manipulation of the Selective Service in order to protect its elitist image.

This thesis concludes that the White House and Navy Department failed to apply pressure on the Marine Corps to eliminate or even loosen its grip on traditional racist practices beyond forcing the organization to accept black enlisted personnel. It highlights that the president could have required the USMC to implement the same steps, using the Army's model of task organization and combat employment, to authorize the commissioning of black Marines. The work that William Hastie began in 1940 to create standard operating procedure manuals outlining the task organization of African Americans could have been expanded to include all the military services.

Had the Navy Department duplicated the work of the War Department, it might well have severely crippled Jim Crow in the Marine Corps, and expedited full integration of all the armed forces. Issues such as these are neither addressed by McLaurin nor in Ronald K. Culp's work, *The First Black United States Marines: The Men of Montford Point, 1942–1946* (2007), in which Culp examines the defense battalions and depot and ammunition companies. Culp emphasizes the significance of these non-combat units in creating opportunities for blacks to fight and prove themselves among their white peers, but these units were never trained or employed to conduct frontline combat missions. Moreover, Culp's work takes a non-critical approach toward the Marine Corps's racist treatment of enlisted blacks, and lacks adequate criticism of the racial attitudes of the white officer corps. Culp also does not sufficiently discuss the societal forces that resisted the first major efforts toward racial integration.

Culp and McLaurin both describe the pervasive racial harassment black Marines received throughout each phase of the war, emphasizing the role of Camp Montford Point as well as black Marines' contributions as (full-fledged) citizens to a nation that would not accept them. Culp and McLaurin provide the most thorough explanations, thus far, of how black Marines laid the foundation for long-term integration. Both authors call attention to aspects of black Marines' service that are little-known, highlighting that African American Marines did not *officially* hold combat arms Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) until the Vietnam War.<sup>2</sup> These two works provide an introductory narrative of the first black Marines by outlining the lives of these men;

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<sup>2</sup> Melton A. McLaurin, *The Marines of Montford Point: America's First Black Marines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 9–13.

however, neither Culp nor McLaurin sufficiently describe the more significant issues that surrounded the social and military acclimation of black Marines, and the Navy Department's feigned efforts in carrying out executive mandates.

The Marine Corps's task organization and failed combat employment of African Americans, during World War II, dated back to U.S. Civil War practices conducted by the U.S. Army. Historian Joseph T. Glatthaar argues that "combat was the single most important aspect of soldiering," and that nearly all white units participated in combat during the Civil War. "Senior-ranking officers of the Civil War felt more comfortable relying on soldiers who had demonstrated their ability to stand up to battle." During World War II, this sentiment had not changed, but black Marines were denied the opportunity to prove themselves in combat. Instead, during the Civil War and World War II, blacks were assigned fatigue labor tasks because like the duty, blacks were regarded as inferior. Similar to their Civil War predecessors, Marine officers offered only "feeble arguments to justify their insistence on the disproportionate amount of labor duties that black units performed," depicting blacks as possessing characteristics "naturally suited for manual labor," and concluding that African American Marines were genetically inferior to whites, unfit to fight, unintelligent, submissive, and likely to crumble under fire.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 182; see also Gerald Astor, *The Greatest War: Americans in Combat, 1941–1945* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1999), 661–662; Major General H.E. Ely, "The Use of Negro Manpower in War," *The Army War College Report of 1925*, Record Group 165: Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, 1860–1952 (Washington, D.C.: College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration);

Supervised by white officers predominately from the South, African American Marines were constantly addressed as “boy” or “nigger,” given menial jobs, passed over for promotion, and frequently humiliated. Black Marines had no choice when it came to Jim Crow laws; they were expected to adhere to the racial mores of the American South, without question—at home and abroad, regardless if they were from the North or the South.<sup>4</sup>

While World War II Marine legends John Basilone and Lewis “Chesty” Puller made names for themselves on Guadalcanal, Peleliu, and Iwo Jima, African American Marines Gene Doughty and Steven Robinson, who participated in the invasion of Iwo Jima and witnessed the flag raising on Mount Suribachi, are commonly unknown. As a member of the 8th Ammunition Company, Doughty served with the 5th Marine Regiment (the most decorated regiment in the Marine Corps) during the invasion of Iwo Jima. According to Doughty, black Marines conducted noncombat duties such as grave registration and cleaning up debris on the beach, while other black Marines with the ammunition companies outfitted weapons and ammunition for frontline combat units.

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Chad L. Williams, “Vanguards of the New Negro: African American Veterans and Post-World War I Racial Militancy,” *Journal of African American History* 92 (Summer 2007): 347–352.

<sup>4</sup> Neil A. Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2010), 46. During the U.S. Civil War, an area in which the federal government openly discriminated against African American Soldiers was in the amount of fatigue duty, or military labor, that white senior officers assigned to them. From the outset, nearly all high-ranking officers preferred to detail African American units to manual labor and “save” their white units for combat. Even though black units were promised by military authorities that “they were to fight and not work as common laborers,” blacks performed all manner of fatigue duties—soldiering was a far second duty for many African American soldiers. Held over from the U.S. Civil War era, this same philosophy remained true for black Marines during World War II. See Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 182–183.

Doughty struggled to accept being relegated to cleanup and labor tasks, he joined the Marines to fight for his country: “I felt that we were taken advantage of. The black Marines were essentially laborers and that did not go well with me. I believed that we, American citizens, should have the right to stand beside any man there and take part in opposing the enemy as United States Marines in defense of our country.”<sup>5</sup>

Steve Robinson shared a unique experience during the invasion of Iwo Jima: “When I think about all the men, and I’m talking about not just the blacks, I’m talking about the whites, young kids, 17, 18, 19 years old that I buried. I buried, Basilone, John Basilone. Basilone was a Congressional Medal [of Honor] winner. He was on Guadalcanal. He was given a Congressional Medal of Honor on Guadalcanal. He was killed on Green Beach on Iwo Jima. I took his personal items out of his wallet to send back to his mother or his wife whoever [survived him]. I took his gear. I took pieces of his skivvies and his underwear because Basilone was a hero to me. He was a man that didn’t have to go into combat. He was killed on Green Beach and that’s where we buried him. We buried him up at the National Cemetery on Green Beach. That was courage.”<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, Robinson stressed how tactically involved African Americans were during the invasions of Iwo Jima, Peleliu, Saipan, and Okinawa.<sup>7</sup> He described several

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<sup>5</sup> Gene Doughty, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin. (June 29, 2005), [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Doughty\\_Gene.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Doughty_Gene.html) (hereafter cited as Doughty interview); Doughty quoted in Clarence E. Willie, *African American Voices From Iwo Jima: Personal Accounts of the Battle* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010), 87; Doughty quoted in Gail Buckley, *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm* (New York: Random House, 2001), 320–321.

<sup>6</sup> Steven Robinson, interviewed by Melton A. McLaurin. (June 29, 2005), [http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Robinson\\_Steven.html](http://library.uncw.edu/web/montford/transcripts/Robinson_Steven.html) (hereafter cited as Robinson interview).

incidents in which black Marines defended airstrips and security posts, saving the lives of American pilots and killing hundreds of Japanese, “If it had not been for [us, with the help of a few white Marines on our flank], but mostly black Marines to stop those Japanese from coming through the lines and overrunning our position, overrunning the white Marines behind us and killing all the pilots, [they would not have made it]. But you never heard of that. But nobody, at least to my knowledge, nobody fought a war for recognition. They fought a war because it’s something you have to do.”<sup>8</sup>

World War II signaled a watershed for African Americans. Before the war, outside of a few black businesses, most doors to economic and industrial opportunity were closed. Under the pressures of war, government policy, world opinion, and from blacks themselves and their allies, some doors began to open. Nevertheless, after the war, the military achievements and wartime contributions of African American Marines failed to receive proper recognition until 65 years later.<sup>9</sup> By the early twenty-first century black heroes and icons of World War II were not referred to, or addressed, as “boys” or “niggers,” nor did they have to prove themselves to a nation that no longer regarded them as second-class citizens.

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<sup>7</sup> “Saipan Landing a Grim Ordeal Of ‘Taking’ Rain of Mortar Fire,” *New York Times*, July 2, 1944; “Saipan Raids Cost Japan 13 Aircraft,” *New York Times*, November 29, 1944; “Books of the Times,” *New York Times*, October 4, 1945. See also David F. Winkler, “The Montford Point Marines,” *Seapower* 54 (September 2011): 60; Gerald Astor, *The Right to Fight: A History of African Americans in the Military* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 1–4, 229–230, 259–260, 499; Astor, *The Greatest War*, 661–662.

<sup>8</sup> Robinson interview.

<sup>9</sup> *Washington Post*, “Marine Corps Pushing for Congressional Medal for First Black Marines Amid Push to Diversity,” August 2, 2011; Winkler, “The Montford Point Marines,” 60.



Yet this belated recognition did little to compensate for the past during which the USMC, a branch that believed in its own initiative and pioneering spirit, failed to lead by example or even to follow the other military services in providing for its black members *every* wartime opportunity (i.e., combat assignments and officer commissions). Although previously exclusive, and the smallest military branch, the Marine Corps could have greatly increased the visibility of black Marines by documenting their military achievements and wartime contributions, and demonstrated to the American public that the price for global democracy and winning the war at all cost outweighed tradition. Instead the Corps successfully denied its African American Marines the opportunity to be recognized as members of the publically acclaimed *Greatest Generation*.

The policies of the Marine Corps concerning the status of African Americans failed to keep pace with those of the other military services or of American society as a whole. Letter of Instruction No. 421 left no room for interpretation and Montford Point enabled racial policies and segregationist practices to persist during World War II, which supplanted any and all forms of racial activism within the USMC. In the 1940s, Black Marines could not even *push* for a greater role and equality because it was an unrealistic expectation. Even so, in 1940, Secretary of War Henry Stimson asked William Hastie to assist in the formulation and implementation of administrative policies that would ensure equality and the most effective utilization of African American manpower in the U.S. Armed Forces. Hastie was also tasked with the responsibility of making recommendations to the War Department on existing military policies and practices

regarding blacks.<sup>10</sup> However, Stimson never made the commitment, written or verbal, to eliminate segregation and racial discrimination in the Army, much less the Navy or the Marines over whom he had no authority. The War Department's official position concerning black and white race relations in the Army was that it was not a "social laboratory for effecting social change within the military establishment." As the Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, Hastie stood fast in his opposition to any policy of discrimination and segregation in the armed forces. He assumed his position with the hope that he could work effectively toward the integration of the Army.<sup>11</sup>

From the outset of World War II, the War Department influenced the draft so that the number of blacks who entered the military represented the total U.S. population in 1940. Thus, each branch of the military would include in its planning to have roughly 10 percent of its forces comprised of African Americans.<sup>12</sup> But pushing toward one out of ten U.S. military personnel had its own limitations. Moreover, a mandate such as this to relegate blacks to represent approximately 10 percent in each of the branches of service, demonstrates that a uniformed policy regarding the treatment of African Americans in

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<sup>10</sup> Letter from Henry Stimson to William Hastie, Secretary of War, October 25, 1940, Box 151, Robert Patterson Papers, Record Group 107: Records of the Secretary of War, 1791–1947 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration). Although this letter states "U.S. Armed Forces," it suggests that African American manpower in the armed forces meant the "Army."

<sup>11</sup> William Hastie quoted in "They Also Serve," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 2, 1940. See also "FDR Makes Davis General," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, November 2, 1940.

<sup>12</sup> The 1940 U.S. Census indicated that African Americans represented 10.3 percent of the total population. See Bryan D. Booker, *African Americans in the United States Army in World War II* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 3.

the military could have been administered with effectiveness throughout the U.S. Armed Forces.

A uniform policy would have increased awareness among black communities of the War Department's defense aims. Some of the Marines of Montford Point had little, if any, knowledge of Executive Order 8802 or the Navy Department's May 20, 1942, press release, announcing the USMC's plans for recruiting African Americans. One could argue that the War Department's management of the armed forces recruiting program prohibited information dissemination, which adversely affected the number and rate at which blacks entered the armed forces. William Hastie believed that the black press needed to be part of the formula for recruiting African Americans. Hastie urged the Acting Adjutant General H. B. Lewis to apply pressure on the Public Relations Bureau to increase its advertisement program in such a way that the black press could be used to recruit African Americans.<sup>13</sup> Yet the War Department did not include the black press in its formula to recruit blacks; in addition, the department never funded advertisements for recruiting African Americans in the black press, which effectively excluded the black media from participating in its recruitment program. The War Department "held that no advertisements would be placed in newspapers or magazines which represented the interest of a particular ethnic group."<sup>14</sup> Although the War Department refused to utilize

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<sup>13</sup> Memorandum from William Hastie to General H.B. Lewis, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, October 6, 1942, Box 151, Robert Patterson Papers, Record Group 107: Records of the Secretary of War, 1791–1947 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).

<sup>14</sup> Memorandum from General H.B. Lewis to William Hastie, Acting Adjutant General, October 8, 1942, William Hastie Papers, Record Group 220: Records of the President's

the black press for recruiting African Americans between 1940 and 1942, its failure to compromise had the same effect of admitting indirectly that it was indeed guilty of segregation and racial discrimination.<sup>15</sup> This example proves that the War Department, a major organ of the executive branch of the U.S. Government, consciously reinforced the negative racial tone set by top military officials.

The history of black Americans is as old as American history. Before 1965, blacks in the military had been largely ignored in most treatments of American history. To fight and win a two-ocean war, America needed unprecedented numbers of men and women to enlist and train for military service; still, this significant source of manpower, the African American, was ignored, overlooked, and never fully accepted.

In many cases the notion of modern day “diversity” was a form of dissent in the military during World War II. Notwithstanding, and facing the odds, black Marines stayed the course and persevered the hardships of the “white man’s service,” creating a legacy of pride and determination for continuing generations of black Marines to emulate and carry forward. Yet, today the main theme surrounding the Marines of Montford Point centers on the lack of documentation in current scholarship to produce significant historical work, in not only military history, but also American history.

There are several notable Marine memoirs of World War II that have received national recognition, however the majority fail to mention any wartime achievements or

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Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces (College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).

<sup>15</sup> Philip McGuire, “Judge Hastie, World War II, and Army Racism,” *Journal of Negro History* 62 (October 1977): 354.

military contributions of African American Marines.<sup>16</sup> For example, during an intense firefight on the island of Peleliu, and in desperate need of replacements, Corporal Edward Andrusko, author of *Love and War Beneath the Southern Cross* (2003) and a veteran of the 3rd Battalion 7th Marine Regiment, recalled an incident in which black Marines participated in significant combat: “Exhausted from the heat, we rested near the beach in the shade of a damaged supply truck. A young black sergeant who had overheard our plight, walked up and said, ‘I heard you were all looking for some troop replacements.’ Our top sergeant looked a little stunned and speechless at the black, uniformed sergeant. The Top cleared his throat and asked, ‘Who are you? Are you Army, Navy, Seabees or what?’ The Marine sergeant replied, ‘Top Sergeant, I am a U.S. Marine Sergeant. My men on this beach are all U.S. Marines.’” These black Marines were members of the 16th Field Depot, 7th Ammunition Company and had completed their duties on the beach. Andrusko further recalled, “Our top sergeant appeared very puzzled. How could he bring in an all-black unit to rescue members of a line company that was part of the famous, all-white 1st Marine Division? It was heavily complemented

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<sup>16</sup> The following are other notable Marine memoirs of World War II, but do not mention significant wartime achievements or contributions by blacks in the same fashion as Edward Andrusko: George P. Hunt, *Coral Comes High* (original publication, 1946; reprint, Nashville, TN: Battery Press & Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Association, 1995); James W. Johnston, *The Long Road of War: A Marine’s Story of Pacific Combat* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Robert Leckie, *Helmet For My Pillow: From Parris Island to the Pacific* (New York: Bantam Books, 1957); Eugene B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1981); Bertram A. Yaffe, *Fragments of War: A Marine’s Personal Journey* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1999).

with southern officers and men, home-based at New River, North Carolina, and ‘the pride of the South.’”<sup>17</sup>

According to Andrusko, the black Marines armed themselves despite the top sergeant’s statements that they were neither trained nor qualified for the terror of battle. The black Marines lined up behind their platoon sergeant, insisting to be led to the frontlines of the battle. After the initial firefight, Andrusko described that “when we reached our mauled and overrun company area, it looked like General Custer’s last stand.” Only one officer remained, Second Lieutenant Bill Bailey, the new commanding officer replacement, who said to the black platoon sergeant, “Thank God. Thank you, men. Sergeant, take over. Get our wounded and dead out [and off the battlefield].” Following the cleanup of the company area, Andrusko explained what took place afterwards: “We gave cover fire and watched in awe as our new, gallant volunteers did their job. Some of these new men stoically held a casualty stretcher gently in one hand as true angels of mercy. Then, when necessary, they would fire an automatic weapon with the other hand, while breaking through surrounding enemy. The grateful wounded thanked the volunteers as each was brought to the rear aid station and safety. One badly

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<sup>17</sup> During World War II, Corporal Edward Andrusko served with Company I, 3rd Battalion 7th Marines. He served four years as a Marine combat Infantry rifleman and fought in four major campaigns, earning three Purple Hearts. Edward Andrusko, interviewed by Cameron D. McCoy, August 12, 2011 (hereafter cited as Andrusko interview). See also Edward Andrusko, *Love and War Beneath the Southern Cross: A World War II Memoir from the South Pacific Islands and Australia* (N.P.: Andrusko, 2003), 193–200; Astor, *Right to Fight*, 229–230, 259–260, 499; Andrusko quoted in Astor, *The Greatest War*, 661–662, Astor, *Right to Fight*, 1–4.

wounded southerner said, 'I felt like I was saved by Black Angels sent by God. Thank you. Thank you all!'"<sup>18</sup>

This platoon of approximately 50 black Marines braved enemy fire to supply needed ammunition, food and water to Andrusko's company, and remained with the unit through the morning until they evacuated all the wounded. After a long night of occupying foxholes with the black Marines, and fighting small, nighttime enemy counter attacks, Andrusko recalled that "the next morning, our company commander ordered us to take the hill. After several bloody hours of fighting, Item Company survivors and our black volunteers did just that. We were relieved from the gruesome mountain by a U.S. Army infantry company. As soldiers passed, they asked sarcastically, 'Who are the black guys in your outfit?' Our top sergeant bellowed, 'Why some of our company's best damn Marines, that's who!'"<sup>19</sup>

Andrusko further recalled, "Despite being saved by untrained stevedores, our top sergeant would not put the black Marines up for a medal. When I asked that he recognize them for saving our lives on Peleliu [by putting them up for a medal], he replied, 'A medal! We will be lucky if we don't get our asses shot off for this [embarrassing disaster]!' It was so prejudiced back then that whites would not acknowledge the [combat] achievements of black Marines, even though they saved our company."<sup>20</sup>

During the Peleliu campaign, where was the media propaganda machine for these African American Marines to cement their legacy as war heroes and icons of the Pacific?

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<sup>18</sup> Andrusko interview.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

After his participation in combat on Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima, the media propaganda machine turned John Basilone into an instant celebrity. Basilone returned to the United States and participated in a war bond tour to raise money for the Allied effort, and was offered a commission. In addition, a *Manila John Basilone at War* comic book for children was published in his honor.<sup>21</sup>

The national media and the U.S. Navy embraced the heroic actions of Mess Attendant Third Class Doris “Dorie” Miller, but not with the same energy as it had done for Basilone. Miller, an African American, is credited with shooting down several Japanese planes with a machine gun from the deck of the USS *West Virginia* during the attack on Pearl Harbor. When news of his actions reached the American public, the black community saw him as their symbol of patriotism and pride. Black leaders wanted him to give speeches, named Boys Clubs after him, and started a write-in campaign to have President Franklin D. Roosevelt admit him to the Naval Academy. For his heroic actions, Miller was awarded the Navy Cross for bravery; he was the first African American to be awarded the Navy Cross, at the time, the second highest honor awarded by the U.S. Navy after the Navy Distinguished Service Medal.<sup>22</sup> Unlike Basilone, Miller was never asked to participate in a war bond tour, nor was he offered a commission.

In further contrast to Basilone, who was a highly trained machine gunner, Miller described firing the machine gun during the battle, a weapon that he had not been trained to operate: “It wasn’t hard. I just pulled the trigger and she worked fine. I

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<sup>21</sup> James Brady, *Hero of the Pacific: The Life of Marine Legend John Basilone* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 1–11, 73, 76, 92–96.

<sup>22</sup> “Messman Awarded Navy Cross By FDR,” *Chicago Defender*, May 16, 1942.



had watched the others with these guns. I guess I fired her for about fifteen minutes. I think I got one of those Jap planes. They were diving pretty close to us.” Secretary of the Navy Knox commended Miller’s bravery, and Chester W. Nimitz, the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, speaking of Miller, remarked: “This marks the first time in this conflict that such high tribute has been made in the Pacific Fleet to a member of his race and I’m sure that the future will see others similarly honored for brave acts.” During World War II, the Navy Cross was the highest military decoration for bravery awarded to an African American—Miller would be the only African American to receive the award during the war.<sup>23</sup>

Recognizing the bravery and heroism of Dorie Miller, the Office of War Information (OWI) released recruitment posters displaying Miller with his Navy Cross under the title, “Above and Beyond the Call of Duty.” Furthermore, by 1945, the success of the Tuskegee program was shown in the remarkable film *Wings for this Man: Tuskegee Airmen*. In addition, the OWI had created war bond posters featuring a Tuskegee Airman, furthering national recognition to an already exceptional combat unit.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “Ask Navy To Lift Ban In Honor of Young Hero,” *Chicago Defender*, March 16, 1942; “Dorie Miller, Pearl Harbor Hero, Commended by Knox,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 11, 1942; “Navy Secretary Commends Dorie Miller For Bravery,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 11, 1942. Miller received the Navy Cross on May 27, 1942 for his actions on December 7, 1941.

<sup>24</sup> “Above and Beyond the Call of Duty,” 1943, Record Group 208: Records of the Office of War Information, 1926–1951 (College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration); “Keep us flying! Buy War Bonds,” 1941–1945, Record Group 44: Records of the Office of Government Reports, 1932–1947 (College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration); *Wings for this Man: Tuskegee Airmen*, by the Department of the Army (1945, Army Air Forces Special Film Project Number 151, AVA08663VNB1), Record Group

These examples, specifically the Tuskegee Airmen, illustrate the significant wartime contributions and distinct tasks the Army assigned to African Americans. Their role as active combat soldiers enabled them to stand out as champions of World War II, and as future military heroes and icons. At the same time, the Marine Corps sacrificed military efficiency in order to uphold racial segregation and discrimination. It bears repeating that the Navy Department had the means, resources, and above all, the location to implement and conduct a Tuskegee Airmen-style experiment for Montford Pointers; the Marine Corps had demonstrated that it could screen and select African Americans to become non-commissioned officers and drill instructors, yet made no provisions to conduct a similar selection process for commissioning blacks.<sup>25</sup>

By 1945, African American Marines had earned Silver Stars and Purple Hearts, yet their wartime contributions failed to surface to the American public's level of visibility. Serving exclusively as members of "support" units did not have the same appeal or attraction as serving as frontline combat troops. Notwithstanding, a Silver Star is the nation's third highest military decoration for valor in the face of the enemy; it must

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111: Records of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer (College Park, MD: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration). See also Stephen Vaughn, "Ronald Reagan and the Struggle for Black Dignity in Cinema, 1937–1953," *Journal of Negro History* 77 (Winter 1992): 1–16.

<sup>25</sup> Moreover, it was not until October 1943 that the black press began to raise the issue of black officers in the Marine Corps. See "Suggestion for the Next Broadcast," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 19, 1944; "Mr. President, What of the Marines?" *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 19, 1944; "Not One Officer in Marines," *Philadelphia Afro-American*, August 19, 1944. In September 1944, the presence of African Americans in the USMC was inconsequential; the majority of white Marines were unaware that blacks had been permitted to enter the Marine Corps. See Andrusko interview.

be stressed that everything a black Marine achieved, regardless of how large or small, was accomplished for the first time in history.

After the war, the level of disrespect and denial by white Marines to recognize the wartime exploits of Montford Pointers reached new extremes. When discussing the Peleliu campaign experience in which “Black Angels” saved the members of Item Company, Edward Andrusko shared, “Seldom if ever did wounded survivors from our company bring up the heroics of the black Marines on Peleliu. This epic was denied by some, but ignored by most.”<sup>26</sup> An example such as this reveals that the impact of African Americans in the USMC, during the World War II era, was negligible at best and that their presence in support of the Allied effort was, in effect, invisible.

The establishment of Montford Point failed to accrue the requisite momentum to serve as a suitable complement to the success of the Tuskegee Airmen program or the all-black Army infantry divisions. The actions of Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox and the Marine Corps’s general leadership effectively sidelined African American Marines, and ensured that their legacy as members of the *Greatest Generation* would remain in question. Nevertheless, the true legacy and military contribution of the Marines of Montford Point is that they broke the color barrier and integrated the Marine Corps. All black Marine officers can clearly trace their 65-year lineage to Frederick C. Branch, who was commissioned a Marine Second Lieutenant on November 10, 1945. In addition,

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<sup>26</sup> Andrusko interview. See also Astor, *The Right to Fight*, 499–500. In February 1990, during a reunion of the Marine Veterans of Iwo Jima at Camp Pendleton, California, more than 150 white veterans acknowledged that they never saw black Marines on Iwo Jima. Furthermore the chairman of the reunion committee would not allow anyone to address role and actions of African American Marines. See Astor, *Right to Fight*, 499–500.

Camp Montford Point marks the location of every black Marines' origin.

After 144 years of being denied the opportunity to officially serve their country as U.S. Marines, on June 1, 1942, the nation's first African American Marines broke the color barrier, gaining entry into a military organization that today carries with it tremendous symbolic and mythic significance in America. Moreover, the Marines of Montford Point demonstrated bravery and endurance in the face of institutional racism. They served in harm's way to defend a nation that regarded them as inferior, and returned home committed to extinguishing segregation and racial discrimination. For the men of Montford Point, World War II ushered in a new tradition of military service in the United States Marine Corps.

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## APPENDIX A

EXECUTIVE ORDER 8802: Prohibition of Discrimination in the Defense Industry<sup>\*</sup>

June 25, 1941

Whereas it is the policy of the United States to encourage full participation in the national defense program by all citizens of the United States, regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin, in the firm belief that the democratic way of life within the Nation can be defended successfully only with the help and support of all groups within its borders; and

Whereas there is evidence that available and needed workers have been barred from employment in industries engaged in defense production solely because of consideration of race, creed, color, or national origin, to the detriment of workers' morale and of national unity:

Now, Therefore, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the statutes, and as a prerequisite to the successful conduct of our national defense production effort, 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, and I do hereby declare that it is the duty of employers and of labor organizations, in furtherance of said policy and of this Order, to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries, without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin;

And it is hereby ordered as follows:

1. All departments and agencies of the Government of the United States concerned with vocational and training programs for defense production shall take special measures appropriate to assure that such programs are administered without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin;
2. All contracting agencies of the Government of the United States shall include in all defense contracts hereafter negotiated by them a provision obligating the contractor not to discriminate against any worker because of race, creed, color, or national origin;

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<sup>\*</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Executive Order 8802: "Prohibition of Discrimination in the Defense Industry," June 25, 1941, Record Group 11: General Records of the United States Government, 1778–1992 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).



3. There is established in the Office of Production Management a Committee on Fair Employment Practice, which shall consist of a Chairman and four other members to be appointed by the President. The Chairman and members of the Committee shall serve as such without compensation but shall be entitled to actual and necessary transportation, subsistence, and other expenses incidental to performance of their duties. The Committee shall receive and investigate complaints of discrimination in violation of the provisions of this Order and shall take appropriate steps to redress grievances which it finds to be valid. The Committee shall also recommend to the several departments and agencies of the Government of the United States and to the President all measures which may be deemed by it necessary or proper to effectuate the provisions of this Order.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

APPENDIX B  
NAVY DEPARTMENT

IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
PRESS AND RADIO  
MAY 20, 1942

MARINES ANNOUNCE PLANS FOR RECRUITING NEGROES IN USMC\*

The first battalion of Negroes, numbering about 900, will be enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve during the months of June and July, it was announced at U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters.

Those volunteers will form a composite battalion which is a unit including all combat arms of the ground forces composed of artillery, anti-aircraft, machine guns, tank and infantry, and including also billets for recruits who are skilled in various trades and occupations such as radio operators, electricians, accountants, carpenters, draftsmen, band musicians, riggers and blacksmiths.

Until a training center is ready for their reception recruits will be temporarily placed in an inactive duty status. The training center will be in the vicinity of New River, North Carolina where a large Marine Corps post is now located. As required, Negro recruits will be ordered directly from their homes to duty in this training area.

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\* Department of the Navy, "Marines Announce Plans for Recruiting African-Americans," Department of the Navy, May 20, 1942, Record Group 428: General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1941–2004 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).

## APPENDIX C

## LETTER OF INSTRUCTION NO. 421\*

May 14, 1943

From: The Commandant, U. S. Marine Corps.  
 To: All Commanding Officers.

Subject: Colored Personnel.

Enclosure: (A) Copy of ltr CMC to Distribution List,  
 AO-3BO-Kb, (0107743) dated 20 March 1943.

1. Enclosure (A) is forwarded for your information and guidance in connection with the handling of colored personnel.

2. The initial assignment of colored personnel to Marine Barracks and Marine Detachments at posts and stations within the continental limits of the United States will be in the rank of private first class and private.

3. While rapid promotion, when deserved, is necessary, it is essential that in no case shall, there be colored noncommissioned officers senior to white men in the same unit, and desirable that few, if any, be of the same rank.

4. Subject to the above provision, promotion of colored personnel is authorized in the same manner as applicable to all Marines. In case where, for example, a colored corporal is qualified for promotion to sergeant prior to the time all white corporals in the unit have been replaced by colored ones, recommendations will be made to this Headquarters, and if the recommendation is approved, the man will be transferred to a post where his services can be utilized in the higher rank. The same procedure will be followed through all the ranks until only colored noncommissioned officers are employed in all colored units. The above does not apply to members of the Steward's Branch.

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\* Letter from the Commandant, U.S. Marine Corps, to Distribution List, dated March 20, 1943, Subject: Colored Personnel (formerly classified CONFIDENTIAL), Record Group 127: Records of the United States Marine Corps (Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration). See also Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces: Basic Documents VI*, Blacks in the World War II Naval Establishment (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1977), 431–432.

5. Beyond the continental limits of the United States, commanding officers will control promotions of colored personnel as necessary to carry out the spirit of the directive.

6. On all change sheets and strength reports, colored personnel will be shown separately. They will not be included in quotas for transfer unless transfer orders so state, except that beyond the continental limits of the United States they may be transferred in such manner as the Corps, Division, Wing, Area or Force Commander may direct.

7. Since the inclusion of colored personnel in Marine Corps organizations is a new departure, it is requested that commanding officers make a study of one situation as it exists from time to time and the problems involved, and make reports to the commandant, Marine Corps. This report should include the adaptation of Negroes to military discipline and guard duty, their attitude towards other personnel, and vice versa liberty facilities, recreation facilities, and any other matter that would be of interest to the Commandant.

8. All Marines are entitled to the same rights and privileges under Navy Regulations. The colored Marines have been carefully trained and indoctrinated. They can be expected to conduct themselves with propriety and become a credit to the Marine Corps. All men must be made to understand that it is their duty to guide and assist these men to conduct themselves properly, and to set them an example in conduct and deportment.

9. Commanding officers will see that all men are properly indoctrinated with the spirit of paragraph 8 above, particularly when Negro troops are serving in the vicinity.

T. HOLCOMB.

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