

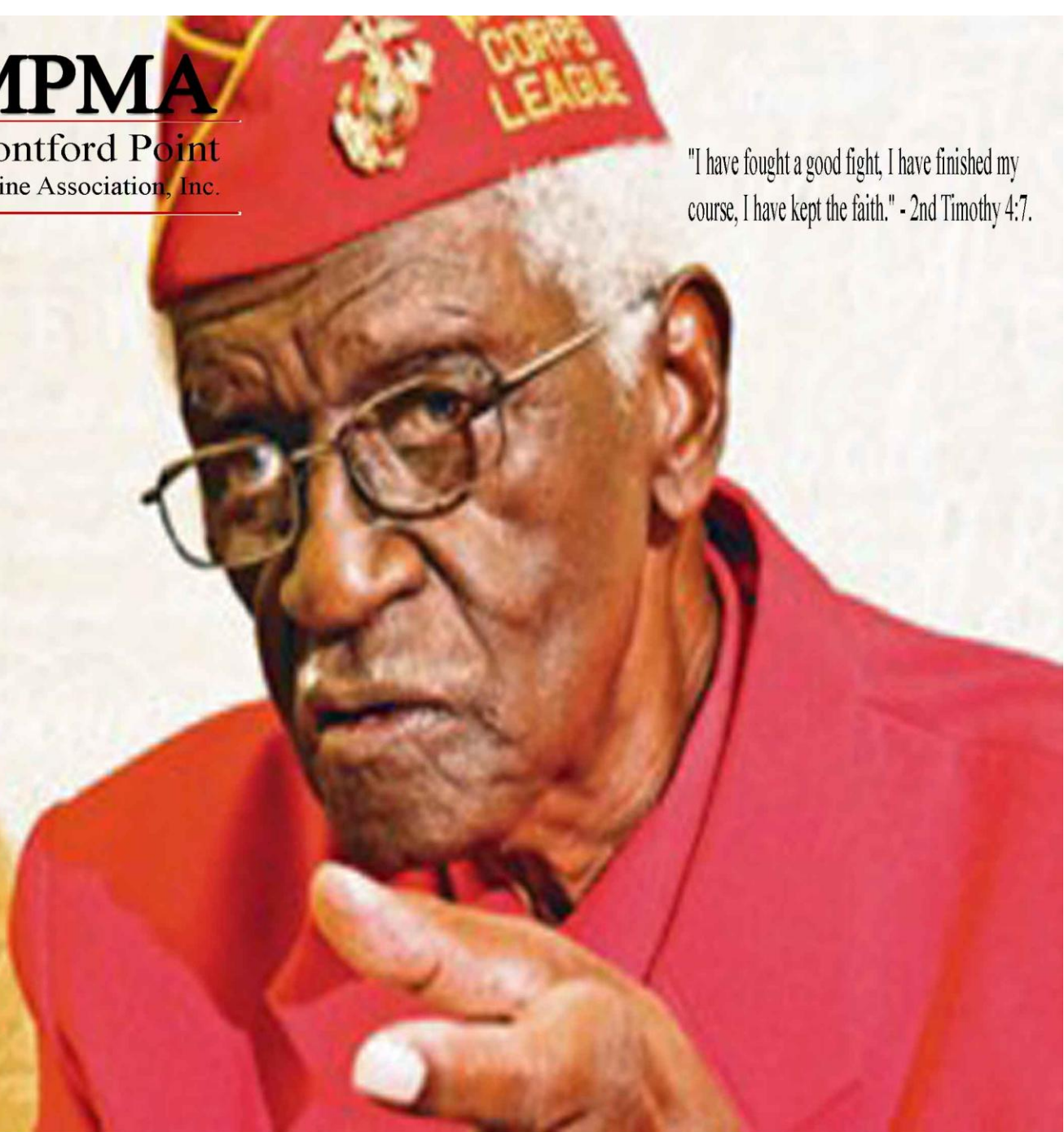


MPMA

Montford Point
Marine Association, Inc.

MARINE CORPS LEAGUE

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." - 2nd Timothy 4:7.



Mr. Charles Payne
a member of the Marine Corps League
and a Montford Point Marine
attends special recognition function
in Washington DC

Press



Release



"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." - 2nd Timothy 4:7.

Orangeburg resident Charles Payne and other Montford Point Marines from across the nation could use that Bible verse as their testimony of service and sacrifice.

The 85-year-old was among the first African-Americans who entered the U.S. Marine Corps from 1942 to 1949 at Montford Point Camp - a

segregated camp affiliated with Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Payne was among approximately 37 Montford Point Marines who converged upon the U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters in Washington on Aug. 26 for a recognition program held in honor of the first African-Americans entering the Marine Corps.

"It was quite a gathering. They came from California, Michigan, South Carolina, Georgia and all around. I was amazed about it all myself. During most of my life after I got out of the Marine Corps, I didn't pay very much attention to anything. I worked and ran a business and so forth but when I came back to Orangeburg, I began to find out just what the Marine Corps did for me and why I'm the way I am," Payne said.

He said Orangeburg has many military veterans who extol the principles he learned while serving in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1944 to 1946. He now serves as chaplain of the Greater Orangeburg Leathernecks No. 1259 Marine Corps League.

"Semper Fi means to be always faithful. I try to be faithful in what I do. I try to be on time. Being a Marine taught me a lot of things that are good and positive, and there's a strong, binding patriotism with it, too. We've had a few Montford Point Marines from Orangeburg," Payne said.

Payne was joined on his trip by Orangeburg residents William W. Washington and Baby Ray Larkin, a retired Marine Corps veteran and member of the Greater Orangeburg Leathernecks No. 1259 Marine Corps League.

The three men got to meet U.S. Marine Corps Commandant James F. Amos and Sgt. Maj. Carlton Kent, an African-American who was the 16th sergeant major of the Marine Corps and retired June 9 after more than 35 years of service. The men also visited Quantico and the National Museum of the Marine Corps during their trip.

Drafted at the age of 18 in 1944, Payne followed in the footsteps of a friend by deciding to join the Marine Corps.

"He used to tell me, 'Man, don't come in here.' He had just finished dealing with white drill instructors. They had black drill instructors when we were in and they were tough, too. Some of them made a career out of it and became very famous," Payne said.

Payne said Sgt. Major Gilbert "Hashmark" Johnson was one of them. Johnson was one of the first blacks to enlist in the U.S. Marine Corps and one of its first black drill instructors. The Montford Point facility at Camp Lejeune, N.C., was renamed Camp Gilbert H. Johnson in his honor, the first military installation to be named after an African-American.

Payne left Montford Point not sure where he was going to be stationed, but ultimately ended up spending most of his time in Oahu, Hawaii's most populous island.

"I did not want to, but my company pulled out with Task Force 58 for Saipan and Guam. They left me in the hospital with the mumps. I was put in casualty company, and one day they came through looking for someone that would take inventory at the quartermaster unit. There were two blacks, including me, that went down there. We were privates first class at the time and all the other whites were sergeants, master sergeants and everything else," Payne said.

He got to meet celebrities during his time there.

"It was a mess in that place but after we got it straightened out, the captain of the quartermasters decided that they would keep us there. So we stayed there for the whole duration, and I met a lot of people like Cesar Romero and Bob Crosby, Bing Crosby's brother," Payne said.

He was particularly impressed with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who he described as "quite the statesman."

"He came out to address us in 1945. I know that he was under the impression that we were going to invade Japan at the time. He said, 'Anyone on the island who hasn't seen any action will see it in Japan.' Our quartermaster was right across the street from Hickam Field. One day we saw these beautiful silver B-29s come through. It was exciting to them and, as we found out, they were going to Saipan and Guam which had already been set up with the airports," Payne said.

"They were going to use the B-29s for the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The day that it was bombed, I was still at my post in Hawaii. I have a lot of pictures of the signing of the armistice aboard the USS Missouri. I also got a Japanese sword from out of Iwo Jima that I got from a fella that came through," he said.

Payne said he had some exciting times in Hawaii, which he left in 1946 aboard a ship bound for Camp Pendleton in San Diego, Calif.

"We took a troop train across the country, and it took us a whole week to get to Camp Lejeune. It was amazing how life had changed. Some of my fondest memories at Montford Point include the time when I was out on liberty one time in Wilmington, N.C.," when a white serviceman asked him to sit by him on a bus, Payne said.

"Whites took up all the seats and whatever was left was what the blacks would get. That caused a lot of problems at the time but just as I was walking to the back, a white crewman pulled me down and said, 'You're not going anywhere. Sit down here, you're one of us,'" he said.

Payne said while segregation was an entrenched institution during his military service, federal executive orders helped to change things.

"In 1941, President Roosevelt gave executive order 8802, which established the fair employment practices that began to erase discrimination in the armed forces. Now that was quite a document because out of that came the WPA, PWA and all the different government operations that actually helped us a lot," he said.

Larkin said the trip with Payne was a good experience. He said the tribute made to the Montford Point Marines was a fitting one.

"This is something that should have been done years ago. It's history and lets the world know that the Marine Corps back in the 40s during segregation came a long way."

Contact the writer: dgleaton@timesanddemocrat.com and 803-533-5534.

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