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Houses Passes Bill to Award North Carolina's Montford Point Marines the Congressional Gold Medal

U.S. Rep. Brad Miller Pays Tribute to the Marines on the House floor

Washington, D.C. – Nearly 70 years ago, the first black Marines began training at Camp Montford Point in Jacksonville, North Carolina because they were not allowed access on the all-white Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base. Today, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the Marines for serving with distinction during World War II while enduring injustice at home.

The Congressional Gold Medal is awarded to a civilian or groups of civilians as the highest expression of national appreciation for distinguished achievements and contributions.

Click <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6nbCjixalbc> to view Rep. Miller's floor remarks. Full text of remarks is below:

MR. SPEAKER, I RISE TO SUPPORT AWARDING THE CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL TO THE MONTFORD POINT MARINES. WE HAVE HONORED THE ARMY'S BUFFALO SOLDIERS AND THE AIR FORCE'S TUSKEGEE AIRMEN. IT'S TIME TO GIVE THE MONTFORD POINT MARINES THE HONOR THAT IS THEIR DUE.

THE MONTFORD POINT MARINES FOUGHT AN ENEMY ABROAD AND INJUSTICE AT HOME. THEY SERVED WITH GREAT VALOR AND DISTINCTION, AND LOVED THEIR COUNTRY MORE THAN THEIR COUNTRY LOVED THEM AT THE TIME.

PRESIDENT FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT ORDERED IN 1941 THAT THE MARINE CORPS BE OPENED TO AFRICAN-AMERICANS, BUT THE MARINES CONSIDERED THEMSELVES THE MOST ELITE BRANCH OF OUR MILITARY, AND THE MOST TRADITIONAL, AND MANY RESENTED ROOSEVELT'S ORDER THAT AFRICAN-AMERICANS BE ACCEPTED.

THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN MARINES WERE HARDLY WELCOMED WITH OPEN ARMS.

THEIR SEGREGATED UNIT WAS STATIONED IN MONTFORD POINT, NORTH CAROLINA. THEY WERE NEAR CAMP LEJEUNE, BUT THE MONTFORD POINT MARINES COULD ONLY ENTER CAMP LEJEUNE IN THE COMPANY OF A WHITE OFFICER. THEY WERE PASSED OVER FOR YEARS FOR PROMOTIONS THAT WHITE MARINES ACHIEVED IN WEEKS. WHEN THEY TRAINED WITH WHITE MARINES, WHICH WAS RARE, THEY WAITED UNTIL WHITE MARINES HAD EATEN BEFORE THEY WENT THROUGH THE CHOW LINE.

THE MONTFORD POINT MARINES WERE SENT TO THE PACIFIC THEATRE TO SERVE BEHIND THE LINES, NOT IN COMBAT FOR WHICH THEY WERE PRESUMED TO BE UNSUITED. NO ONE TOLD THE JAPANESE, HOWEVER. THE MONTFORD POINT MARINES SERVED IN SAIPAN, IWO JIMA AND OKINAWA, THREE OF THE BLOODIEST BATTLES IN THE PACIFIC. THEY CAME UNDER INTENSE FIRE AND SHOWED GREAT COURAGE, WINNING THE PRAISE OF SKEPTICAL WHITE OFFICERS.

PRESIDENT TRUMAN FULLY INTEGRATED THE ARMED FORCES IN 1948 AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN MARINES SERVED SIDE-BY-SIDE WITH WHITE MARINES IN KOREA AND IN EVERY CONFLICT SINCE THEN. THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE OF THE MONTFORD POINT MARINES LARGELY MADE THAT POSSIBLE.

GENERAL AMOS, THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINES, SAID HE WANTS EVERY MARINE, FROM PRIVATE TO GENERAL, TO KNOW THE HISTORY OF THE MARINES WHO FOUGHT AN ENEMY OVERSEAS, AND RACISM AND SEGREGATION IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY.

I WANT EVERY MARINE, AND EVERY AMERICAN, TO KNOW THAT HISTORY.

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