



Marine James Arthur Johnson gives the camera a sly grin.

Winnsboro man was a Montford Point Marine

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Staff Writer

Winnsboro's James Arthur Johnson was a Montford Point Marine, one of the first African American men to be allowed to enlist in the United States Marines.

In 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued a presidential directive, giving African Americans an opportunity to be recruited into the Marine Corps. These African Americans, from all states, were not sent to the traditional boot camps of Parris Island, South Carolina and San Diego, California. Instead, they were segregated, going

through basic training at Montford Point, a facility at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Approximately 20,000 African American recruits received training at Montford Point Camp.

Johnson served from September 1943 until January 1946. He qualified as a rifle marksman in November 1943 and served in the Pacific theater.

At the time of his honorable discharge from the United States Marines as a private first class, he was receiving monthly pay of \$54. His travel allowance upon discharge was five cents a mile between Camp Lejeune,

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North Carolina and Winnsboro, South Carolina.

Johnson was the brother of Mary Johnson Ashford, Rev. Frank Johnson, Willie Mac Johnson, Oscar Johnson and Isaih Johnson. He was married to Emma M. Davis. The couple was the guardian of Harriet D. Harper for a number of years. His parents were James Myers and Mary M. Smith Johnson of Fairfield County.

Ashford was nine years old, when Johnson returned to Winnsboro. Despite her young age at the time, Ashford remembers her brother talking about his service as a Montford Point Marine.

"Okinawa - Iwo Jima," she said. "He said the Marines

were hard on them."

Ashford recalls that her brother told his family that he was kicked, when he walked through the gate at Montford Point. Additionally Johnson will tell his family about the natives in the Pacific theater looked.

Like many World War II soldiers, Johnson witnessed friends being killed.

"It still had some kind of effect on him after he came home," she said. "Sometimes he would just sit and act like he was worried. He wasn't like that before he left."

Despite his father's objection, Johnson entered the Marines, because he wanted to serve his country.

Johnson knew little about a segregated society, Ash-

ford said.

"The people down on the quarry were pretty good," Ashford said. "He didn't know anything about the Marines. When I got older, I asked him why he entered the Marines. He said he didn't know anything about the Marines and just wanted wanted to fight for his country."

Johnson, according to his sister, was a friendly and nice person.

"He had a good personality," Ashford said. "Everybody liked him. He went to school at St. Barnabas (Episcopal Church School on the western side of the county). "When he came out of the military, he went to Camp Liberty high school."

He married shortly there-

after. Johnson wanted to return to the Marines. His mother didn't want to see her son re-enlist and he never did.

Johnson served as choir leader and trustee at his church.

He was also a car mechanic and he could do repairs around a house.

One of Johnson's greater accomplishments was saving a man's life who was drowning.

"This boy had gone down and when he went down the second time, James caught him," Ashford said. "I don't know his name. He was a visitor (to the county)."

Another man at the scene died.

At his death in 1986 Johnson was a tombstone maker.

*The Herald Independent
January 30, 2007*

*Donated by:
Mary Ashford
2/14/2007
LM*