



Kinston man helped desegregate Marines

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KINSTON, N.C. - James "3-D" McGee has worn many hats in his life, from professional boxer and tap dancer, to artist and small business owner. But there is one hat in his collection few men had the fortitude to obtain: that of a Montford Point Marine.

As such, McGee was a member of a small group of black men who overcame a seemingly impenetrable racial barrier in the U.S. military.

He was quick to volunteer for military service as America mounted its offensive forces in World War II.

The Army deemed him 4F unfit for military service due to his chest's inability to expand. He next tried the Navy, which said his weight was too far below standards. Discouraged, the newspaper delivery boy walked into a store in his native Madison, Ill. A shopkeeper jokingly told him to try the Marine Corps, as it was about to open its ranks to blacks. McGee faintly remembers the clerk chuckling as he turned and walked out of the store, and toward the Marine Corps recruiting office. But he remembers the next moment with crystal clarity.

"I remember the way the Marine's eyebrow raised when I walked in the door," McGee said. "He said to me (eyebrows lowering and voice deepening) 'What 'dya want, boy?' I told him I wanted to join, and I told him I had been denied by the Army and Navy and why. He barked at me 'Get on that scale!'" McGee said. "Now, I only weighed 97 pounds soaking wet, but his scale read 112. And when he brought a doctor in, his measurements said my chest expanded just fine. Of course, none of that was true, but it didn't matter to me."

McGee had found a way in, but had no idea what was waiting for him on the other side.

On March 22, 1943, he had his first potent taste of reality when he reported for duty with the 38th Platoon at Montford Point.

The last blacks to serve in the Marine Corps were a few who fought in the Revolutionary War. Racial tensions intensified in the following century and a half. While other military branches allowed segregated black units, it took Executive Order No. 8802, issued June 25, 1941 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, to permit blacks to serve as Marines in any capacity.

McGee and his fellow black recruits were not allowed to attend the historic Marine Corps boot camp at Parris Island, S.C. Instead, they were given a piece of unused swampy land outside of Camp Lejeune. To their flank was the War Dog Platoon and even the canines had better training facilities than the black men.

To minimize the racial animosity, the Marine Corps provided the blacks their own post exchange, recreational facilities and buses. But physical encounters were common, and commanders usually turned their heads. McGee's first such encounter came when he was admitted to Camp Lejeune Naval Hospital because of a cut on his arm.

A cut on his arm was deemed too serious to endure the 15-minute ride back to Montford Point, so McGee was admitted to the base hospital.

"That was a tough time," he said. "There were a lot of racial slurs, and downright hatred. It didn't matter that I had volunteered to help in the fight. They didn't want me in their Marine Corps, and quickly let me know that."

Attrition was high among the Marine recruits, even in time of war, and was only intensified for McGee by the racism and his small frame.

But he had a secret weapon; he had heart. Heart that refused to accept anything less than success; heart that earned him the coveted position as platoon guide. Heart that carried him to graduation despite everything that stood against him.

"Yeah, I faced a lot of racism and hatred," he said. "Yeah, I had a hard time physically. But it made a man out of me. It made a Marine out of me. And I made it ... I made it, alright."

McGee's service ended March 20, 1946, but he returned to the Corps ranks Feb. 20, 1953, as the Korean War gripped the nation. McGee immediately recognized a whole new attitude shown toward blacks in the military. It was far from perfect, but President Harry Truman's 1948 declaration of intent to end segregation in the military had taken great strides toward equality among the forces.

McGee stayed on active duty until Feb. 24, 1972. In that time, the heart that guided him through boot camp helped him to achieve success in four primary military occupational specialties, service as a mechanic on 12 different kinds of Marine aircraft, five campaigns in Vietnam and numerous decorations and awards.

In a fitting close to his active service, the small boy from Illinois with a heart the size of Texas received a meritorious battlefield promotion to the rank of gunnery sergeant.

McGee transferred to the inactive reserves a short time later, and submitted his full retirement on March 1, 1980.

McGee remembers his time at Montford Point as though it were yesterday.

He spouts off names and hometowns of men shown in a faded picture of his 38th Platoon though he hasn't seen them in nearly 60 years. Montford Point has since been renamed Camp Johnson, in honor of Sgt. Maj. Gilbert "Hashmark" Johnson, the Corps first black sergeant major.

He carefully preserves the memories of such men in his own museum, located in a shop in his back yard. It holds all of his military memorabilia from 30 years of service spanning four decades, as well as dozens of paintings and mementos from throughout his life.

His service decorations hang equally beside a certificate that identifies him as "Grandpa of the Year."

Race relations have turned from a thorn in the Corps side to one of its proudest achievements.

In countless studies and evaluations, numerous government and independent agencies have found the Marine Corps to have all but obliterated racism within its ranks.

That is the legacy of which McGee is most proud. It took oceans of blood, sweat and tears, but the Montford Point Marines were able to overcome. They served, they fought, they died ... they survived.

Above all, they were able to break the impenetrable barrier, chipping it away one piece at a time.

"I am so proud to say I played a part in ending the racism in the Marine Corps," McGee said. "I look at these black sergeants major, colonels and generals, and I am so proud of them. They do their country proud, and I am glad to have been one who helped them on their way."

Trial opens in grisly dragging murder

By TERRI LANGFORD
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JASPER, Texas - A sheriff testified Tuesday that he figured out pretty quickly the accident he was investigating was no hit-and-run - especially after a lighter with three interlocking K's was found along the bloody trail left by a black man who had been dragged to his death.

"I'm a brand-new sheriff. I didn't even know the definition of a hate crime, but I knew somebody had been murdered because he had been black," Billy Rowles said. "Once we saw the KKK emblem on the cigarette lighter, that's when we started having some bad thoughts."

Rowles was the first witness as alleged white supremacist John William King went on trial Tuesday on murder charges in the gruesome death of James Byrd Jr. Byrd, 49, was chained to the back of a pickup truck June 7 and dragged for three miles as his body was ripped to pieces.

King, a 24-year-old unemployed laborer, is the first of three white men charged in the crime to stand trial. He could get the death penalty if convicted.

Prosecutor Guy James Gray said in his opening statement that King's tattoos and writings in his apartment show King was an angry racist who wanted to form a hate group and "needed to do something dramatic in order to gain in their warped world respect for his newly formed gang."

The jury consists of 11 whites and one black. Jasper County, from which the jurors were drawn, is 18 percent black.

King's attorney, Haden "Sonny" Cribbs, made no opening statement, reserving the option to do so later. "The evidence, it appears overwhelming," he acknowledged Monday. "But you've got to prove the accused has done the offense."

Cribbs objected to evidence showing King's graphic tattoos and letters, saying they were constitutionally protected as free speech. His objections were overruled.

The sheriff, one of eight witnesses to testify Tuesday, described to jurors what he saw early in his investigation. Rowles said the evidence wasn't consistent with a routine hit-and-run accident: There were no skid marks, and the bloody trail did not run parallel to the tire tracks.



Hundreds gathered for the funeral of James Byrd last summer. The trial for one defendant in the grisly murder case opened Tuesday.

"It was going through my mind. ... Somebody's dragging something," Rowles said.

The lighter with three K's forming a triangle was also engraved with the word "Possum," the nickname King picked up while in prison for burglary.

An 18-year-old man who knew Byrd, Steven Scott, said he saw Byrd in the early morning hours of June 7 walking along Martin Luther King Boulevard.

"He was staggering over the road," Scott said, adding he thought Byrd was drunk. He decided to not offer the man a ride.

When he arrived home a short time later, he said he saw Byrd, seated in the back of a pickup, drive by. Three whites were in the truck cab.

The jurors were given a folder of photos of Byrd's battered remains, which an investigator said were missing a right arm, neck and head.

An 18-year-old Jasper woman, Michelle Chapman, testified that during a two-year period while King was in prison,

she received 19 letters from him, some of them filled with racist venom. One included the proclamation: "White is right."

When he got out, Chapman said, King visited her in June 1997 and showed the tattoos he got while locked up, including one of a black man hanged. Gray, the prosecutor, said the tattoos also include a burning cross, a Confederate flag and Nazi swastikas.

The lighter, King's DNA on a cigarette and less than a drop of the victim's blood on King's shoes all will link King to the killing, the prosecutor said.

Investigators also found handwritten notes in King's apartment that included a constitution, bylaws, a code of ethics and a membership application for a group to be called the Texas Rebel Soldiers of the Confederate Knights of America, Gray said.

King showed little reaction in court, responding only with a "not guilty, your honor," when asked how he pleaded.

King's ailing father, Ronald, an oxygen tube in his nose, sat nearby, as did Kylie Greeney, his girlfriend and mother of the couple's infant son.

As has been the custom, he wore a bulletproof vest as he was escorted into the courthouse by deputies. The 110-year-old courthouse has been outfitted for the trial with metal detectors, package scanners and numerous security cameras. State District Judge Joe Bob Golden has barred rallies and signs about the case for two blocks.

Two other men, Lawrence Russell Brewer, 31, and Shawn Allen Berry, 23, will be tried later.

Thirteen members of Byrd's family were present when court began, but some left, including two of his children. Some burst into tears when Byrd's blackened and torn white underwear was introduced into evidence.

"I'm trying to get closure to what happened to my father," said Renee Mullins, 28, who stayed in court. "I feel obligated to be here."

RECHARGE, REUSE, RECYCLE.

We all know recycling aluminum, plastic and paper is great for the environment.

Now you can recycle Nickel-Cadmium (Ni-Cd) rechargeable batteries. These batteries are used in many portable products such as cellular phones, power tools and camcorders, and they can be recycled when they're no longer useful.

IT'S EASY. Just look for the RBRC Battery Recycling Seal and for me, Richard Karn, wherever you buy Ni-Cd batteries.

For more information, call 1-800-8-BATTERY

or visit our website, www.rbrc.com.



The Charge Up to Recycle international spokesperson is Richard Karn of TV's Home Improvement.



Look for the Seal

The Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation (RBRC) is a nonprofit, public service organization created to promote the recycling of Nickel-Cadmium (Ni-Cd) rechargeable batteries.

Great Kings of Africa

Celebrate Black History with The Great Kings & Queens of Africa Portraits

BEHANZIN HOSSU BOWELLE

THE KING CHRONICLE (1941-1992)

Join the Great Kings & Queens of Africa program. Features a series of unique portraits - each the work of a talented African-American artist. This remarkable series brings the past to life. It not only celebrates the centuries of rich contributions African leaders have made to world history, but it also provides a prominent stage on which today's young artists can express their talents.

Today, these 29 portraits have become one of the most influential art collections reclaiming the heritage of African-American culture. Through a traveling exhibit, *Budweiser's Great Kings & Queens of Africa* program has touched the lives of millions, educating and inspiring audiences across America.

Budweiser is proud to help keep the spirit of Africa's great leaders alive. Our hope is that these powerful portraits will inspire all who see them to use their talents to create a rich, vibrant future for our communities.

When ordering, please specify youth or adult version of calendar.

To receive a complimentary copy of your Great Kings & Queens 1999 Calendar - Please Call 1-800-DIAL-BUD (As long as supplies last)

<http://budweiser.com> ©1999 ANHEUSER-BUSCH, INC. BREWERS OF BUDWEISER BEER, ST. LOUIS, MO • GUAM