

By: Senator(s) Barnett, Branning, Caughman, To: Rules
DeBar, Jackson (11th), McCaughn

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 43

1 A RESOLUTION HONORING THE LEGACY OF MARINE CORPORAL VONZIA J.
2 RIGSBY OF JASPER COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI, THE OLDEST LIVING MONTFORD
3 POINT MARINE, ON THE OCCASION OF HIS 100TH BIRTHDAY.

4 WHEREAS, Veteran Vonzia J. Rigsby, 100, became a Marine
5 during a time when black and white Marines were still segregated;
6 and

7 WHEREAS, calling on his duty to serve his country, Rigsby was
8 one of many black Marines who served during World War II as
9 Montford Point Marines. Because the Marine Corps was the last
10 military branch to be integrated, black service members trained at
11 Montford Point in Jacksonville, North Carolina, from August 1942
12 until the camp was decommissioned in September 1949. The largest
13 number of black Marines to serve was at the seizure of Okinawa,
14 with 2,000 seeing action. During World War II, more than 19,000
15 blacks served in the Marine Corps; and

16 WHEREAS, the National Montford Point Marine Association was
17 established in 1975 to honor blacks who served in the Marine
18 Corps; and



19 WHEREAS, Naval Air Station Meridian hosted the Montford Point
20 Association on October 21, 2019, for a ceremony to honor
21 98-year-old Vonzia James Rigby with the Congressional Gold Medal.
22 Rigby, a World War II veteran with honorable service as a United
23 States Marine, was among the second enlistment of African-American
24 Marines, as part of the 52nd Defense Battalion. His service, from
25 November 25, 1943, to April 22, 1946, included duty in Honolulu
26 and Nagasaki, Japan. He was honorably discharged as a Corporal;
27 and

28 WHEREAS, Rigby returned to Newton County and worked for
29 Gulf, Mobile and Ohio Railroad. He later completed technical
30 school and worked as an auto body technician in a career of more
31 than 50 years in Newton and Jasper Counties. Rigby has been
32 involved in Civil Rights efforts for several decades, and was
33 among a local group of citizens who occupied the premises of the
34 Decatur Courthouse to champion the right to vote in Mississippi;
35 and

36 WHEREAS, Montford Point Marines were the first
37 African-Americans to enlist in the United States Marine Corps
38 after President Franklin Roosevelt issued an Executive Order
39 establishing the Fair Employment Practices Commission in June
40 1941. The recruits trained at Camp Montford Point in
41 Jacksonville, North Carolina, from August 1942 until the camp was
42 decommissioned in September 1949; and



43 WHEREAS, Colonel Rigsby was a true American hero. Like all
44 the other Montford Point Marines, he was a trailblazer who dared
45 to be a Marine during a time when African Americans were excluded
46 from the Marines. The story of the Montford Point Marines was a
47 story of resilience and perseverance. Those Marines should not be
48 forgotten, and everyone should honor their sacrifice, and for this
49 a grateful state thanks him for a life of selfless service and a
50 legacy of a strong and free America:

51 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF
52 MISSISSIPPI, That we do hereby honor the legacy of Marine Corporal
53 Vonzia J. Rigsby of Jasper County, Mississippi, the oldest living
54 Montford Point Marine, extend the best wishes of the Senate on his
55 100th birthday, and extend to Mr. Rigsby and his family the thanks
56 of a grateful state.

57 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to
58 Corporal Rigsby, forwarded to the National Montford Point Marine
59 Association and NAS Meridian, and made available to the Capitol
60 Press Corps.

