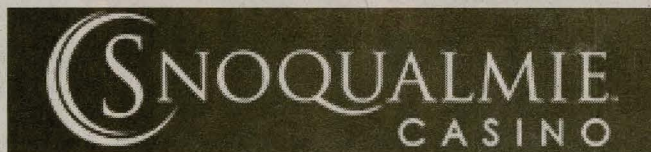


COMMUNITY ROOTS

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Clayton Pitre: Latest World War II Profile Added To Legacy Washington

OLYMPIA - In its latest World War II profile, Secretary of State Kim Wyman's Legacy Washington team is releasing the little-known story of Clayton Pitre, a Black Montford Point Marine who trained at a segregated base in World War II.

Pitre, a longtime Seattleite, slogged through the mud in the bloodiest battle of the Pacific as a Montford Point Marine, one of the first Black Marines since the Revolution. The Montford Point Marines courageously served their country in a prejudiced America, yet their story is rarely told. Pitre is believed to be among the few survivors in the Pacific Northwest.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt banned discrimination in the Armed Forces 74 years ago, on June 25, 1941. Executive Order 8802 opened the ranks of the U.S. Marine Corps to blacks for the first time since the American Revolution. One of the African-Americans who enlisted was Pitre, a longtime Seattleite and the descendant of slaves and slave owners from the Deep South. Pitre is believed to be one of the last living Marines in the Pacific Northwest who trained at a segregated base in North Carolina in World War II called Montford Point. He is among some 400 survivors in the country.

"Clayton Pitre represents a chapter of World War II history that most people have never heard," Wyman says. "The vast majority of the war's histories do not mention the Montford Point Marines or their contributions in the conflict. In an era of racism, these brave men fought in some of the most vicious battles of the war's Pacific theater."

Pitre and about 20,000 other men broke the color barrier in World War II when they trained at Montford Point. The Montford Point Marines were banned from crossing railroad tracks and leaving the Black section of the camp without a White escort, and prohibited from advancing up the ranks like their White counterparts. Some Montford Point Marines reputedly were arrested by authorities while taking leave. Police had never seen an African-American Marine and took them into custody for impersonating a member of the U.S. Marines Corps.

At Montford Point, Pitre was



Clayton Pitre. Photo courtesy of Legacy Washington/Lori Larson.

assigned to the First Marine Ammunition Company, responsible for hauling explosives to the front lines. Pitre saw the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. On April 1, 1945, he landed at Okinawa where he was a decoy and carried ammunition into the heart of battle.

"You think that you may lose it but you've gone this far," Pitre says. "You just hope that it won't happen. I can't describe it. What happens with people is there is something in you. I prayed. I prayed to myself. I prayed that I'd make it. But I saw others who broke. I saw others who broke and they just had to

send them back."

After the war, Pitre was discharged from the Marines and moved to Washington state. He is active in Northwest support groups for the Marine Corps today and hopes other Montford Point Marines tell their stories to add to the historical record.

In 2012, Pitre and some 400 Marines were finally honored with the Congressional Gold Medal in Washington, D.C.

Clayton's story is part of a special series, called Washington Remembers, that captures the experiences of World

War II veterans who call this state home. The next Legacy Washington profile will be about Fred Shiosaki, a Japanese American who won the Bronze Star and Purple Heart with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, one of the most decorated units in American military history.

On August 20, Legacy Washington will unveil a special exhibit in the Capitol Building that features the World War II veterans profiled online, and more.

KBAC

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and they began to recognize that that [KBAC] ain't playing."

While the organization has engaged in many battles, they are also actively involved in advancing issues of education, economics and political empowerment. They register people to vote at all of their events, and they even have a member of their organization who now sits on the Kent City Council.

The organization meets the fourth Saturday of the month from September to July at the Kent Commons, and they take pride in having an open door

policy. They not only encourage people to attend meetings but to bring forth issues that they feel should be addressed.

"A lot of our meetings are driven by actions," says KBAC Board Member Willie Wright. "So if there is something that is happening in the community and where individuals need help on something we don't just stick to the schedule. We'll establish something right then and take a look at it."

While many pundits thought the organization would not last this long,

the members of KBAC want people to know that they are here and they are here to stay.

"The name Kent Black Action Commission should not be taken lightly," says Johnson in response to those who would question the name of the organization and use it as an excuse not to participate in their events or efforts to affect positive change in the community. "By us calling ourselves by who we are and the good stuff that we do, we're changing that stereotype that you have and no we won't change our

name. You need to get comfortable with coming and helping us."

KBAC Board member Charles Carston couldn't agree more.

"Some folks are afraid of the browning of America, and some folks are afraid of the blackening of Kent," says Carston. "I think we already changed the way Kent looks and it's going to continue to change."

For more information or to contact KBAC, visit their website at www.kent-blackactioncommission.com.

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