When we celebrate Black History Month in the Marine Corps, we honor the Marines who, through their accomplishments and dedication to duty, led our ranks to grow into a fighting force that is diverse in people and diverse in thought. The Marine Corps’ first Black Marines built their legacy at Montford Point where they trained and prepared to serve in World War II. The Montford Point Marines created some of the most prestigious and professional warfighters who we look up to today, like SgtMaj Gilbert “Hashmark” Johnson and SgtMaj Edgar Huff. Seven years later in 1949, Annie Graham became the first Black woman to enlist in the Marine Corps, setting a new standard shortly after when reception, training and housing of Black Marines was integrated. We are grateful for the perseverance of the Marines who helped our nation break barriers and change the paradigm of what was thought to be a United States Marine. After all, we know all too well that Marines fight and win because of the trust and confidence we place in the Marines serving by our side. We honor Marines like PFC James Anderson Jr., the first Black Marine to be awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in Vietnam. While on patrol in a dense jungle, his platoon faced an ambush thick with small-arms and machine-gun fire. As he and his platoon fought back, a grenade was lobbed into his position where he was bunched up with his fellow Marines. Without hesitation, PFC Anderson grabbed the grenade and tucked it into his chest, absorbing the blast that killed him. PFC Anderson exemplified what it means to be ‘Semper Fidelis’ and his heroic actions saved the lives of his Marines – the people he trusted and who trusted him. We proudly carry on the legacy of these great Marines who helped shape our Corps.

Semper Fidelis,

TROY E. BLACK
Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps