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USS FRANK E. PETERSEN JR. (DDG 121)

Honoring A U.S. Marine Corps Pioneer

A Distinguished History

- Born March 2, 1932, in Topeka, Kan., Frank E. Petersen Jr. joined the U.S. Navy as a seaman apprentice in June 1950. He served as an electronics technician and in 1951 entered the Naval Aviation Cadet Program.
- In October 1952, Petersen completed flight training and accepted a commission as a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps.
- Petersen served two combat tours: Korea in 1953 and Vietnam in 1968. He flew more than 350 combat missions and had more than 4,000 hours in various fighter/attack aircraft.
- He was the first African American Marine Corps aviator and the first African American Marine Corps officer to be promoted to brigadier general.
- At the time of his retirement in August 1988, Lieutenant General Petersen was, by date of aviator designation, the senior ranking aviator in the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Navy with respective titles of "Silver Hawk" and "Grey Eagle."



DDG Quick Facts:

- Name:** USS Frank E. Petersen Jr. (DDG 121)
- Class:** Arleigh Burke
- Mission:** Provide multi-mission offensive and defensive capabilities
- Length:** 509 feet
- Speed:** 30+ knots
- Crew:** 329 total

A Historic Look at African Americans in the U.S. Marine Corps

1941	1942	1942	1945	1946	1950	1967	2012
President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs Executive Order 8802, Prohibition of Discrimination in the Defense Industry, June 25, 1941, during the early days of WWII. The order calls for the end of job discrimination in the defense industry and thus opens the Corps' ranks to African Americans.	On June 1, 1942, Howard P. Perry becomes the first African American U.S. Marine Corps recruit following Executive Order 8802.	The first African American recruits arrive at Montford Point in Jacksonville, N.C., August 26, 1942. A memorial now stands outside the gates of Camp Johnson to commemorate their historic achievements in the face of racial segregation.	On November 10, 1945, 2nd Lt. Frederick C. Branch of Charlotte, N.C., becomes the first African American commissioned officer after completing fully integrated training.	On July 26, 1948, President Harry S. Truman signs Executive Order 9981 to end racial segregation and discrimination in the military. Although it would take more than six years to fully implement, Truman's order set in motion a wave of reforms for equality for African Americans	Frank E. Petersen Jr. becomes the first African American Marine Corps aviator January 1, 1950.	On February 28, 1967, Pfc. James Anderson Jr. becomes the first African American Medal of Honor recipient in the Marine Corps by sacrificing his life by smothering a grenade with his body in Cam Lo, Vietnam.	On June 27, 2012, Congress authorizes the Congressional Gold Medal to be awarded to each of the 20,000 Montford Point Marines or to their families in recognition of the accomplishments and sacrifices made during a time of segregation.

"[He was] a pioneer and role model in many ways, a stellar leader, Marine officer, and aviator."

- Gen. John M. Paxton Jr., the 33rd Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, on Lt. Gen. Frank E. Petersen Jr.