



Sergeant Major Robert E. Smith, Retired, USMC

Sergeant Major Robert E. Smith enlisted the Marine Corps on November 5, 1951 just eleven years after the previously all-white Marine Corps was punctuated by the historically all-black Montford Point Marines. Entering a Marine Corps, at a time that it was still segregated and defiantly resistance to integration. Robert E. Smith rose to the highest enlisted rank in the Unites States Military.

A proud 1951 graduate of the W. A. Pattillo High School, he reported to recruit training at Paris Island, South Carolina. Upon completion of this basic training, he was assigned to Camp Pendleton, California for duty.

In 1952 he saw combat in Korea with the First Battalion, 7th Marines, the "First of the Seventh" as a Squad Leader. From 1953 to 1954 he was stationed at Naval Base Key West, Florida, followed by a four-year tour at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune.

From 1958 to 1961 he served with the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, in Hawaii as a Platoon Sergeant. He returned to Camp Pendleton in August 1961, followed by an overseas tour of duty. Later he returned to the Southern California area serving as the Duty Brig Warden at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego.

In 1967 Sergeant Major Smith returned to combat in the Republic of Vietnam with the 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines, a combat infantry battalion. After that tour of duty in Vietnam from 1968 to 1970, he was stationed at the Marine Corps Detachment, Norfolk, Virginia. He served in Okinawa in 1977 with the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines, followed by a five-year tour at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton. He had a follow up tour in Okinawa in 1976 serving with the Headquarters Battalion. In 1980 he served as Sergeant Major of the 1st Combat Engineer Battalion, which was his last career assignment.

Sergeant Major Smith's decorations include the Purple Heart for wounds received in combat, the Combat Action Ribbon, the Navy Unit Commendation, the Good Conduct Medal with stars (10 awards), the National Defense Service Medal, with one star, the Korean Service Medal, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, the Korean Presidential Unit Citation, the Republic of Vietnam Meritorious Unit Citation Gallantry Cross, the United Nations Service Medal, and the Vietnam Campaign Medal.

He is a member of the Montford Point Marines Association. African Americans in the military throughout the history of the United States have made notable contributions to the defense and security of this nation and the world. Sergeant Major Smith's deportment in the military and his attainments in the United States Marine Corps distinguishes him as a graduate of the W. A. Pattillo High School and reflects great credit upon him and his alma mater.

Sergeant Major Smith retired in San Diego, California with the love of his life, Erma Smith. After her passing he remained in San Diego, California. He is the proud father, and enjoys the company, of his four children: Brenda, Vanessa, Robert, and Michael. He has 11 grandchildren, and 6 great-grandchildren.