

February 20, 1951

Emmett L. Ashford

became the first Black umpire in organized baseball when he was authorized to be a substitute ins the Southwestern International League on this day. He went on to be hired by the American League in 1966. Ashford had a booming voice and theatrical style that endeared him to fans. He did everything with a flourish, from calling pitches to signaling players out or safe. Ashford used huge gestures, to the disdain of batters who were called out on strikes or tagged out on slides. He retired as an umpire in 1970 to work as a public relations representative for Major League Baseball. Ashford died of a heart attack at the age of 65 on March 1, 1980, in Marina del Ray, CA.

February 23, 1979--

Colonel Frank E. Petersen Jr.

became the first Black promoted to the rank of brigadier general in the Marines on this day. A native of Topeka, KS, Petersen earned a bachelor's degree in 1967 and master's degree in 1973 from George Washington University. He also graduated from the National War College in Washington, D.C., in 1973. At the age of 20, Petersen became the first Black aviator in the history of the Marines. He flew over 300 combat missions during his career in the U.S. Marines, including tours in Korea and Vietnam. He spent 38 years in the Marine Corps before he retired in 1988 as commanding general of the Marine Development Educational Command in Quantico, VA. In 1999 Petersen released his autobiography, *Into the Tiger's Jaw: America's First Black Marine Aviator*. He currently serves as the chair of the board of directors of the National Marrow Donor Program and as a member of the Educational Credit Management Corporation.