

Fighter Pilots Earn Highest Honor

Recognition long overdue

(AP) — Congress and President Bush saluted the Tuskegee Airmen six decades after they completed their World War II mission and returned home to a country that discriminated against them because they were black.

"Even the Nazis asked why African American men would fight for a country that treated them so unfairly," President Bush told the group of legendary black aviators, who received a Congressional Gold Medal Thursday — the most prestigious Congress has to offer.

"These men in our presence felt a special sense of urgency. They were fighting two wars. One was in Europe and the other took place in the hearts and minds of our citizens."

Bush then saluted the airmen, saying he wanted to offer the gesture to "help atone for all the unreturned salutes and unforgivable indignities" they endured.

Bush, members of Congress and other dignitaries joined some 300 airmen, widows and other relatives for the ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda.

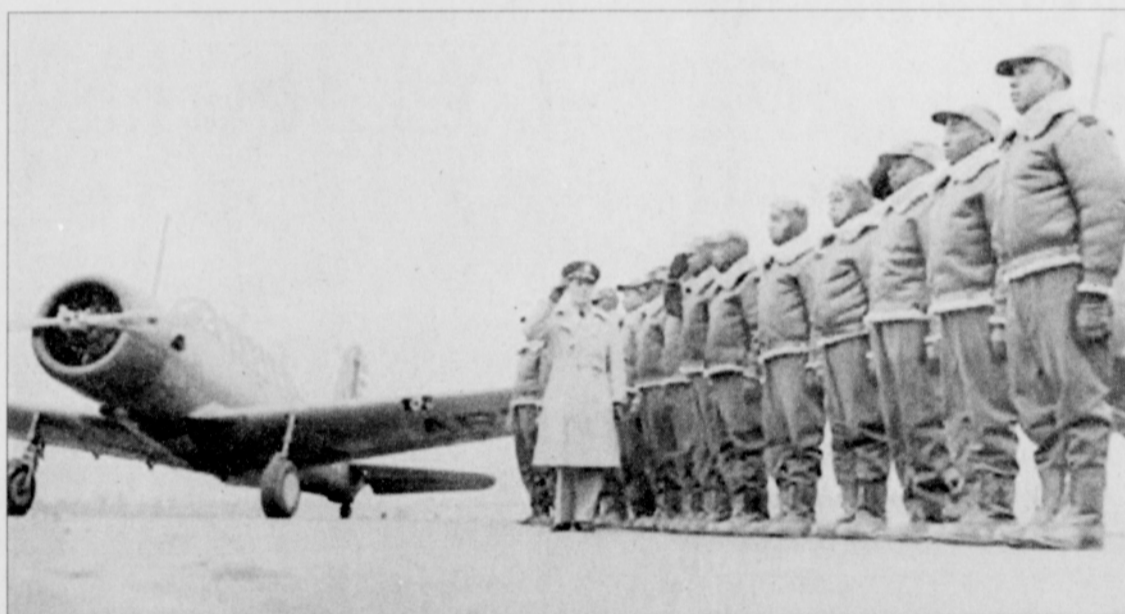
Hours ahead of the event, Tuskegee Airmen — some walking with the aid of canes, others pushed in wheelchairs — flooded Capitol hallways on their way to being recognized for their long-ago heroism.

"It's never too late for your country to say that you've done a great job for us," Ret. Col. Elmer D. Jones, 89, of Arlington, Va., said in an interview this week. Jones was a maintenance officer during the war.

Ret. Lt. Col. Walter L. McCreary, who was shot from the sky during a



Tuskegee Airmen Robert Lawrence of Santa Fe, N.M. (left) and Walter Fiedler of St. Louis appear in Washington, D.C. for the awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal.



Cadets at the Basic and Advanced Flying School for Negro Air Corps Cadets stand at attention in this January 1942 photo at the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Ala.

mission in October 1944 and held prisoner for nine months in Germany, said it hurt that the group's accomplishments had not been honored years earlier.

"We took it in stride. It's recognition long overdue," said McCreary, also 89, of Burke, Va.

House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., the highest-ranking black member of Congress, echoed McCreary's sentiment. Many of the Tuskegee Airmen also trained at Walterboro Army Airfield in his congressional district.

"People are now beginning to come to grips with our history," Clyburn said Thursday in an interview. "Our history is what it is. It's never going to change."

The Tuskegee Airmen were recruited into an Army Air Corps program that trained blacks to fly and maintain combat aircraft. President Roosevelt had overruled his top generals and ordered that such a program be created.

But even after they were admitted, many commanders continued to believe the Tuskegee Airmen didn't have the smarts, courage and patriotism to do what was being asked of them.

Nearly 1,000 fighter pilots trained as a segregated unit at a Tuskegee, Ala., air base.

Not allowed to practice or fight with their white counterparts, the Tuskegee Airmen distinguished themselves from the rest by painting the tails of their airplanes red, which led to them becoming known as the "Red Tails."

Hundreds saw combat throughout Europe, the Mediterranean and North Africa, escorting bomber aircraft on missions and protecting them from the enemy. Dozens died in the fighting; others were held prisoners of war.



Easter Egg Hunts

Friday, April 6

St. Johns Community Center
84287 N. Central
Hunt schedule: 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.
A nighttime hunt at the Bunny Patch in St. Johns
Information: 503-823-9192

Saturday, April 7

Oregon Zoo
4001 S.W. Canyon Rd.
Hunt schedule: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
(every half hour). Free with Zoo admission.
Information: 503-226-1561

Saturday, April 7

Blue Lake Regional Park
20500 N.E. Marine Dr., Fairview
Admission: \$4 per car, \$7 per bus, free with annual pass
Schedule: 10 a.m. to Noon, Hunt begins at 10:30 a.m. (ages 10 and under)
Information: 503-665-4995

Saturday, April 7

American Legion Egg Hunt
Lincoln Park School
13200 S.E. Lincoln St.
Hunt begins at 10 a.m. (ages 10 and under)
Information: 503-252-2201

Saturday, April 7

Gresham Elks Lodge 1805
3330 N.E. Division St.
Hunt begins at 11 a.m. at the lodge.
Information: 503-666-1805

Saturday, April 7

Troutdale Lions Club Egg Hunt
Glenn Otto Community Center
1106 E. Historic River Hwy., Troutdale
Hunt begins at 10 a.m.

Saturday, April 7

Columbia Gorge Premium Outlet
450 N.W. 257th Ave., Troutdale
11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Easter Bunny, treats, balloons
Information: 503-669-8060

Saturday, April 7

Wood Village Baptist Church
23601 W. Arata Rd.
Easter Bunny arrives by helicopter at 9:30 a.m.
Hunt begins at 10 a.m. (ages 9 and under)
Information: 503-667-6211.

Saturday, April 7

Powell Valley Covenant Church
1335 S.E. 282nd Ave., Gresham
Hunt begins at the church at 10 a.m.
(5th grade and under)
Information: 503-665-6638

Sunday, April 8

Lynchwood Church of God
3815 S.E. 174th Ave.
Egg hunts scheduled 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Information: Julie Jackson 503-665-6638

Sunday, April 8

Christ Light Unity Church Egg Hunt
Fairview Community Center; 300 Harrison St.
Hunt to begin at conclusion of 10:30 a.m. services
Information: 503-618-0134

Sunday, April 8

Pleasant Home United Methodist Church
31632 S.E. Bluff Rd., Gresham
Hunt begins at 12:30 p.m.
Information: 503-663-5654

Sunday, April 8

McMenamins Edgefield
Little Red Shed Amphitheater
2126 S.W. Halsey St., Troutdale
Hunts scheduled at 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. (ages 2 to 11)
Information: 503-669-8610

Saturday, April 14

Thunder-Egg and Rock Hunt
Mt. Hood Community College
26000 S.E. Stark, Gresham
Admission: Free
Schedule: Hunt begins at 2 p.m. (ages 12 and under)
Information: 503-558-8500 or ordroc@comcast.net

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