

Senate passes bill creating historic site for Tuskegee airman

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Senate has given final congressional approval to legislation creating a national historic site in Alabama to honor the famed Tuskegee Airmen of World War II.

The legislation, now headed to President Clinton for his signature, would establish the historic site at Moton Field in Macon County, where the black aviators trained before heading off to the war.

"This memorial immortalizes, honors and thanks the Tuskegee Airmen for their courageous and selfless efforts to preserve and protect the freedom that every American enjoys," said Rep. Bob Riley of Ashland, who sponsored legislation creating the historic site.

Because of strict racial segregation during World War II, about 1,000 black military aviators received their flight training at Moton Field.

The Tuskegee Airmen were the first 450 to complete their training and enter the Army Air Corps.

Under the command of Col. Benjamin O. Davis Jr., who later became the first black lieutenant general in the Air Force, the Tuskegee Airmen flew 15,553 sorties in North Africa, Sicily and Europe, completing 1,578 missions, destroying 260 enemy aircraft, sinking one enemy destroyer, and demolishing numerous ground installations.

They won 865 awards, including 95 Distinguished Flying Crosses, eight Purple Hearts and 14 Bronze Stars. Sixty-six of the 450 pilots were killed in action and another 32 were taken prisoner of war.

Tuskegee

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you," Cohen said. "You, sir, are among the rarest souls."

Clinton praised Davis as "a hero in war, a leader in peace, a pioneer for freedom, opportunity and basic human dignity," who withstood withering discrimination in order to blaze a trail for other black Americans.

"When the doors were shut on him, he knocked again and again until finally they opened," Clinton said. "Once the doors were open, he made sure they stayed open for others to follow."

Davis listened stoically, his hands on his knees, while a military aide read the order that promoted him and his Tuskegee pilots—who never lost a U.S. bomber to enemy action in 200 missions—lavished praise on him.

"I salute you, Sir, for standing up in the firestorm of racial prejudice and never losing sight of the fact that this country is as much ours as anybody else's," said retired Air Force Col. William A. Campbell, who was among the first group of pilots Davis commanded.

In return, Clinton was made an honorary Tuskegee Airman. Two of Davis' men, Col. Charles McGee and Lt.

Col. Woodrow Crocket, stripped Clinton of his navy blue suit jacket and dressed him in a bright red blazer bearing the Tuskegee Airmen's seal.

Davis received his fourth star 28 years after he retired and 100 years after his father, Benjamin O. Davis Sr.—America's first black brigadier general—joined the Army. Clinton told the story of how the elder Davis, then teaching at Tuskegee Institute, defied instructions for the school's staff to stay out of sight during a Ku Klux Klan march.

"Instead, he put on his dress uniform, turned on the porch light, gathered his family. They sat proudly and bravely outside as the hate marchers passed by," Clinton said. "Benjamin Davis Jr. never forgot about his father's shining porch light."

Davis is the third military officer to become a four-star general in retirement and the first black officer to be so honored. President Reagan elevated two retirees to general in 1985.

Currently, there are 33 four-star generals on active military duty, 10 of them in the Air Force, the Pentagon says. Of the 33, three are black

— one each in the Army, Navy and Air Force.

It was the Tuskegee Airmen themselves who sought the promotion for Davis.

About a year ago, they sent representatives to Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., with Davis' life story: his graduation from West Point in 1936, despite four years of silence from fellow cadets because he was black; the Army Air Corps' rejection of his pilot application, again because he was black.

They told of Davis' many commands around the world, his numerous medals. But it was the humiliating silent treatment Davis got at West Point that stuck firmest in McCain's mind. Under his prodding, Davis' new star was approved as part of a defense bill in September.

The new designation is largely ceremonial and does not give Davis any additional pension and benefits.

Born in Washington on Dec. 18, 1912, Davis seemed destined for a military career, given the 50 years of Army service by his father. In 1944, the elder Davis pinned the Distinguished Flying Cross on his son for gallantry in the air war over Europe. He died

in 1970 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

The younger Davis was a military science professor at Tuskegee when the all-black 99th Pursuit Squadron was created. In March 1942, then Capt. Davis and four other cadets got their wings and Davis was promoted to lieutenant colonel and took command of the 99th. The next year, Davis became commander of the 332nd Fighter Group.

Davis was promoted to colonel in 1944. In 1945, he became commander of Lockbourne Air Force Base in Ohio, going on to air commands in Korea and Taiwan. In 1954, he became the Air Force's first black brigadier general after the military was integrated.

He was promoted to major general in 1959 and lieutenant general in 1965, serving as a deputy commander-in-chief in the Middle East, southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Davis retired from the Air Force in 1970, and became Cleveland's public safety director. He later joined the federal Transportation Department and became an assistant secretary in 1971, leaving government service in 1975.

Officers

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Edgerton's association with Lyons has been strongly criticized.

He met Lyons and Lyons' brother-in-law for lunch this year and drew fire for being photographed with them.

This past summer, Edgerton was again in the headlines when he vowed to step down as president unless \$25,000 was raised by Sept.

Lawmakers

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time for a significant increase for student assistance," Sen. Bill Ratliff, R-Mount Pleasant, head of the budget-writing Senate Finance Committee, said in October. "Whether it will be of this magnitude or not is hard to say."

Increasing financial aid is a new strategy for lawmakers, said Henry Cuellar, D-Laredo.

"Minority legislators accept that this is the law and we have to comply with it," Cuellar said. "So you have to look at increasing participation of all students."

Providing more loans also would complement a law approved last year that requires state universities to accept students who graduate in the top 10 percent of their class, Cuellar said.

Another avenue for debate will be the importance professional colleges, like

1. The money wasn't raised, and he never stepped down.

O.L. Sherrill, a member of the local branch's executive committee, said he looks forward to the reorganization.

"I think it's the only way (the Asheville Branch) can be saved there's no doubt about that—and we have to have credibility restored to the organization," Sherrill said.

law and medical schools, place on standardized test scores. Cuellar said he will propose legislation to de-emphasize the LSAT in law school applications.

"Whether it's a minority or not a minority, we want students to be judged on a wider perspective," Cuellar said.

That doesn't mean the tests should be thrown away, he added. "They do provide a service."

Among the other changes legislators may consider:

— Cuellar said he may propose an amendment to the appropriations bill to reward universities that have more low-income students. "The more economically disadvantaged students that a university has the more supplemental money the university will get," he said.

— Ellis said there needs to be another public university in Texas. The coordinating board has said the number of students applying to college is going to increase significantly.

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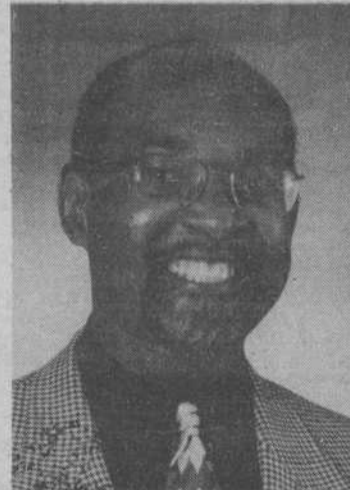
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