

**THE CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL CEREMONY FOR TUSKEGEE AIRMEN,
CAPITAL ROTUNDA WASHINGTON, DC**



President George W. Bush presents Congressional Gold Medal to 300 Tuskegee Airmen during ceremony, Thursday, March 29, 2007, in Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol. The President said, *“The Tuskegee Airmen helped win a war, and you helped change our nation for the better. Yours is the story on human spirit, and it ends like all great stories do – with wisdom and lessons and hope for tomorrow.”*

FOLLOW-ON CEREMONY AT ARIZONA STATE CAPITAL



Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano presents the Congressional Gold Medal to Lt. Col. (Ret) Luke Weathers (R in red blazer) during ceremony at the state capital May 24, 2007. Airmen from the 944th Reserve Fighter Wing, Luke AFB participated in the historic event honoring these airmen of World War II fame.

PRESS RELEASE

PHOENIX -- The state of Arizona honored 14 Tuskegee Airmen during a ceremony May 24 on the capitol lawn.

Governor Janet Napolitano issued a proclamation and presented replicas of the Congressional Gold Medal to the Airmen or family representatives in honor of the "Red Tail Angels" service to their country.

"The brave men of the Tuskegee Airmen are true American heroes," the governor said. "They served when others said they weren't good enough. Their commitment and dedication shows true courage and I'm honored to be with them today."

The Tuskegee Airmen program, started in 1941 by President Roosevelt, was established to create an all African-American flight training program at the Tuskegee Institute of Alabama.

From 1942 through 1946, about 992 pilots graduated and received their commission and pilot wings. The Tuskegee Airmen went on to participate in 1,500 combat missions, flew 15,000 sorties to protect bombers and transport planes, destroy 409 enemy aircraft and sink one destroyer. Thirty-two Airmen became prisoners of war and 66 of the Airmen lost their lives.

Also participating in the ceremony were Col. David Orr, 56th Fighter Wing vice commander, and Col. Derek Rydholm, 944th Fighter Wing commander.

"Today, as we proceed forward in the Air Force, it is crucial that we reflect back on our history and acknowledge the contributions of those who have made so many personal sacrifices for our country's freedom," Colonel Rydholm said. "We are the only country in the world where all people, regardless of race or color, have opportunities to succeed and the efforts of the Tuskegee Airmen have greatly contributed to those opportunities through service in our nation's defense. These men succeeded in the face of great adversity and their contributions will never be forgotten."

Two of the Tuskegee Airmen squadrons, the 301st and 302nd Fighter Squadrons, have called Luke Air Force Base home. Activated under the 944th Fighter Wing in July 1987, the 302nd Fighter Squadron was the first Air Reserve component unit chosen to fly against the MiG-29 in a major NATO-sponsored exercise.

When the total force decision was made to include formal F-16 pilot training as part of the mission of the 302nd FS in 2001, the combat readiness of the squadron remained and the 302nd became the first and only squadron in the Air Force to simultaneously fight and train.

"Having earned respect and a reputation that began with the Tuskegee Airmen in World War II, modern-day war planners chose the 302nd, by request, to participate in operational training of F-22 Raptor initial cadre pilots and tactics validation," Colonel Rydholm said. "The future of the 302nd and Tuskegee legend will continue in emerging new missions as the Air Force Reserve Command plans to move the 302nd flag to Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska, to be the first and only F-22 associate fighter squadron in the command. This is indeed a great honor for all who have worn the squadron patch."

The 301st FS Reserve fighter pilots assigned to the 944th Fighter Wing fly with active-duty 56th Fighter Wing as F-16 instructor pilots. This initiative is part of a larger Air Force vision in progress called the associate pilot training program, where active duty and Reserve personnel train side-by-side.

"Like their Tuskegee brothers before them, the 301st started as an experiment - a wonderful experiment that ultimately proved to be as successful as their heritage namesake," Colonel Orr said. "Not embraced initially and faced with adversity, they overcame and proved to all that an experiment of instructors in the Air Force Reserve integrated with active-duty forces could indeed train the warriors of tomorrow."



L-R: Thurston Gaines, Luke Weathers, Asa Herring



(L-R) Steve Campbell, son of William Campbell, Luke Weathers, Thurston Gaines, and Asa Herring. All in red blazers are original Tuskegee Airmen.



Thurston Gaines with airmen from the 944th Reserve Fighter Wing, Luke AFB