
Tuskegee Airmen Get Congressional Medal

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE, Associated Press Writer Thu Mar 29, 5:13 PM ET

AP PHOTO-President Bush, right, greets Tuskegee Airmen Dr. Roscoe Brown, center, and Lt. Col. Alexander Jefferson, left, in the Capitol Rotunda during the Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony on March 29, 2007.

WASHINGTON -

President Bush saluted the Tuskegee airmen on Thursday, 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," Bush told the group of legendary black aviators, who received a Congressional Gold Medal — 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," he said.

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

Retired Lt. Col. Walter L. McCreary, shot from the sky during a 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.

entertainers, notables in science and medicine, athletes, humanitarians, public servants and foreign officials.

Other black recipients include singer Marian Anderson, athletes Joe Louis, Jesse Owens and Jackie Robinson, civil rights activists Roy Wilkins, Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King, the Little Rock Nine, Rosa Parks and Dorothy Height, and statesmen Nelson Mandela of South Africa and former Secretary of State Colin Powell.

The medal for the airmen, made possible through legislation by Sen. Carl Levin (news, bio, voting record), D-Mich., and Rep. Charles Rangel (news, bio, voting record), D-N.Y., and signed last year by Bush, will go to the Smithsonian Institution for display.