



United States
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Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE *111th* CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

House of Representatives

In Honor of Captain Luther H. Smith

Hon. Joe Sestak
OF PENNSYLVANIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
January 13, 2010

Mr. SESTAK. Madam Speaker,

I would like to honor today the memory of a great American hero, Captain Luther H. Smith, Jr., U.S. Army Air Forces, who will be buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery on Friday, 15 January. Captain Smith was one of the original Tuskegee Airmen, a highly decorated World War II prisoner of war, a recipient of the Congressional Gold Medal, the first African-American aerospace engineer hired by General Electric in its Missile and Space Operations in Philadelphia, a loving husband and father, and a longtime resident of Villanova, PA.

Captain Smith was born in Des Moines, Iowa on September 27, 1920. His early dreams to serve as a military aviator were fulfilled when he joined the U.S. Army Air Forces and began training at Alabama's Tuskegee Army Air Field and Tuskegee Institute. One of the first African Americans to become a licensed pilot, Captain Smith began his military career in 1943. He flew 133 combat missions with the 332nd Fighter Group as a combat fighter pilot over Europe. He was severely wounded on his last mission on Friday, 13 October 1944, and spent the next seven months in enemy hospitals and prison camps before being liberated in May 1945 by the Allied forces. During his distinguished military career, Captain Smith destroyed 2 German aircraft in aerial conflicts and 10 aircraft in ground strafing attacks. Captain Smith was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with 6 Oak Leaf Clusters, the Purple Heart, the Prisoner of War Medal, and 8 European Theater Campaign Ribbons.

After retiring from the U.S. Army Air Forces, Captain Smith completed his engineering education at the University of Iowa, earning a B.S. in mechanical engineering. He was hired by General Electric where he was involved in projects for the Air Force, the Navy Submarine Command, and NASA. His work included missile and jet engine design and he published numerous papers and was awarded two patents.



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Following his retirement from GE in 1988, Captain Smith was active in support of local civic causes, serving as the vice-chairman of the Radnor Township (PA) School Board and on the Board of the Delaware County (PA) Community College.

He also was instrumental in capturing the history of the Tuskegee Airmen – so that present and future generations of Americans could understand their significance. He believed passionately that “racial equality in America started in the skies over Europe.” He and two other Tuskegee Airmen were featured in the 2006 Documentary “*On Freedom’s Wings: Bound for Glory, the Legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen*” which was sponsored by the Pennsylvania Veterans Museum in Media, PA. He also designed the plaque dedicated in memory of the Tuskegee Airmen in Arlington National Cemetery. In May 1995, he was selected by President Bill Clinton to represent the U.S. Air Force for the 50th Anniversary Celebration of VE Day, and he accompanied President Clinton and Vice-President Gore to Europe.

Captain Smith was a member of a unique group of men who possessed an unabashed devotion to this nation and a belief in the strength of American values, even at a time when their country’s laws failed to reflect the values for which they fought.

On Friday, at 9:05 AM, the First Fighter Wing from Langley Air Force Base will offer the ultimate recognition of Captain Smith’s service to this nation. Like Captain Smith, throughout its storied history, the U.S. Air Force First Fighter Wing has been a trailblazer – leading the way in bringing new fighters operational. Four F-15 fighter jets will flyover the internment services for Captain Smith. In the words of Captain Smith’s son Gordon – “I would like to think that my Dad will be beaming with joy and appreciation.”

To Captain Smith’s widow, Lois G. Smith, his son Gordon and daughter Deborah, I offer this tribute. As this nation prepares to honor the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. on Monday, it is fitting that we also honor the memory of Captain Luther H. Smith, Jr. – like Dr. King, a great American hero who fought to realize America’s commitment to freedom for all.

Joe Sestak
Member of Congress