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Res. No. 395

Resolution mourning the death and celebrating the life of Gen. Benjamin O. Davis Jr., who passed away on July 4, 2002.

By Council Members Comrie, Baez, Barron, Felder, Foster, Gerson, Jackson, Koppell, Monserrate, Nelson, Perkins, Sanders, Weprin, Liu, Seabrook, Stewart, Vann and Clarke

Whereas, A son of the Army's first African-American general, Benjamin O. Davis

Jr. was the first African-American cadet to graduate from the prestigious West Point

Military Academy in the 20th century and was one of the first black pilots in the military;

and

Whereas, General Davis is looked upon as an individual who broke down color barriers and shattered racial myths regarding African-American fighter pilots; as commander of the Tuskegee Airmen, the pioneering African-American fighter pilots of World War II, his courage and leadership resulted in numerous air victories and helped speed the integration of the Air Force; and

Whereas, The desire to become an aviator began in 1926 when, at age 14, Benjamin O. Davis Jr. went up with a barnstorming pilot at Bolling Field in Washington in an open cockpit wearing goggles and a helmet; and

Whereas, Benjamin O. Davis Jr. was a man of great achievement, remarkable drive, and high moral resolve, who believed that an individual could, by force of character, overcome even the most difficult of obstacles; and

Whereas, As the only African-American cadet at West Point, Benjamin O. Davis

Jr. encountered terrible racial prejudice, yet he met this challenge with steadfast

determination, managing not only to survive but to thrive in the midst of his detractors,

graduating 35th in a class of 276; and

Whereas, General Davis's achievements are worthy of the highest praise and

honor, and his example is a lesson in perseverance and strength: at no time did he ever

compromise his integrity or abandon his belief in the capacity of the human spirit of

endeavor; and

Whereas, As a result of Benjamin Davis's outstanding service to his country and his tireless work on behalf of African-Americans in the military, in 1948

President Truman signed an executive order providing for integration in the armed

forces; and

Whereas, General Davis was, by all accounts, a representative American who served both flag and country with exceptional commitment and honor; he was highly decorated, receiving the Silver Star and the Distinguished Flying Cross for his leadership during dozens of successful and dangerous missions over Europe; and

Whereas, Most who came under or caught some echo of his influence were changed as a result, and this is best displayed in the impressive combat records of those under his command: fighting against the Luftwaffe in the European theater in World War II, his men shot down 111 enemy planes and destroyed or damaged 273 on the ground; and

Whereas, Benjamin Davis Jr. came up against the narrow limits of skepticism and prejudice and met each with a prodigious faith, challenging his detractors by exhibiting that most quintessential of American characteristics-self-reliance-a characteristic that, from its beginnings, has helped make this country great; and

Whereas, General Davis served at the Pentagon and in overseas posts for two decades, and gained the three stars of a lieutenant general in 1965 when he was chief of staff for American forces in South Korea; in 1998, President William Jefferson Clinton awarded him a fourth star, the military's highest peacetime rank; and

Whereas, General Davis was a man who recognized an injustice and sought to change it, achieving a hard fought and even harder won respectability for the role of African-Americans in the military in what was then a culture resistant to and doubtful of such change; he was truly a visionary, and his legacy of positive social change within the United States military has benefited countless lives; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York mourns the death and celebrates the life of General Benjamin O. Davis Jr., who passed away on July 4, 2002.

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