

Tarpon Springs Widow of Tuskegee Airman Honored

Over the weekend, Gus who serves on the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, presented Mildred Wilson, widow of Staff Sergeant Elmer Wilson, with a bronze Tuskegee Airmen Congressional Gold Medal in honor of her husband's courageous service during World War II.

Photo Courtesy: Klint Lowry/The Suncoast News

The St. Petersburg Times has more:

For Mildred Wilson, it was just another opportunity to speak about her late husband's contributions during World War II.

So as the guest speaker at a Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. birthday celebration in Pasco County in January, she talked of Staff Sgt. Elmer H. Wilson's efforts as a member of the 332nd Fighter Group of the U.S. Army Air Forces.

After her January speech, she was contacted by someone who had read about it in the newspaper. She was told that her husband, who died in 1995, was eligible for a Congressional Gold Medal.

"I didn't call," said Wilson, 89. "But a few days later, I got a call from Congressman (Gus) Bilirakis' office asking me if I wanted to be presented the medal on my husband's behalf."

The Wilsons were married six months before Pop Wilson was drafted in 1941. Mildred went on to earn a master's degree in education and taught home economics in the Philadelphia school district for 19 years. The two had four children and retired to Tarpon Springs in 1988.

The Suncoast News was in attendance to cover the presentation:

"He was so proud that they exceeded the expectations of everybody," Mildred said. And yet he always downplayed his military service. When it came time to board a ship and head back home, he literally left it all behind, leaving his duffel bag sitting on the dock. My husband never talked about it," Mildred said. "He just went there and did what he had to do."

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"Less than 150 of these congressional medals have been awarded in our country's history," Bilirakis said. "The airmen certainly deserve it for what they went through. What great patriots, despite the fact that they were segregated at that time."

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Bilirakis called Elmer, "a quiet hero," and said it was an honor that he resided in Tarpon Springs. Mayor Beverly Billiris delivered an official proclamation making July 25, 2009, "Elmer H. Wilson Day" in Tarpon Springs.

Local CBS affiliate, 10 Connects was also there...

Elmer Wilson died in 1996 but, on Saturday afternoon at the Church on the Bayou Presbyterian Church in Tarpon Springs, he was honored with a bronze Tuskegee Airmen Congressional Gold medal from U.S. Representative Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

"The perseverance and courage exhibited by Staff Sergeant Wilson played an important role in the liberation of millions of people," said Bilirakis. "I am honored to have the opportunity to help recognize his intrepid service as well as the support and resolve of his wife, Mildred, who served as a constant pillar of strength back home." Saturday, Mildred received the Outstanding Military Spouse Award for her support.

She says, "I know that my husband is smiling up there for something that he had worked so hard for." She says the

honor was even more special because she was able to share it with her family and friends. Her church family, members of the VFW, and Girl Scouts attended the ceremony with her.