

**Statement on the Death of
General Benjamin Oliver Davis, Jr.**

July 6, 2002

Two days ago, on July 4th, America lost a true hero when General Benjamin Oliver Davis, Jr., died at Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, DC. Throughout his career, General Davis served the cause of freedom with distinction and dignity. He will be sorely missed. On behalf of a grateful nation, Laura and I send our condolences to the Davis family.

We will remember General Davis most for his leadership of the legendary Tuskegee Airmen during World War II. The segregated African American 332d Fighter Group flew more than 15,000 sorties against the Nazi Luftwaffe, destroyed over 250 enemy aircraft, and never lost a single Allied plane flying under its escort protection. Davis' leadership and the dazzling success of his Tuskegee Airmen contributed greatly to the victory over fascism abroad—and to important victories over discrimination here at home, especially the desegregation of the Armed Services ordered by President Truman in 1948.

The quiet courage, discipline, and high achievement of the Tuskegee Airmen simply mirrored the qualities that Benjamin Davis, Jr., demonstrated throughout his career. A graduate of West Point, he was a recipient of the Silver Star and Distinguished Flying Cross and was the first African American in the Air Force to earn a star. He retired with the rank of Lieutenant General and was awarded his fourth star after his retirement in 1998. His passing on the date of our Nation's Independence underscores the independence and pride with which he served our Nation's highest ideals. General Davis left our country better than he found it and his legacy will endure for as long as Americans seek to protect—and perfect—our Union.

**Remarks on Presenting the
Congressional Medal of Honor
Posthumously to
Captain Humbert Versace**

July 8, 2002

Good afternoon, and welcome to the White House. It's a—this is a special occasion. I am honored to be a part of the gathering as we pay tribute to a true American patriot and a hero, Captain Humbert "Rocky" Versace.

Nearly four decades ago, his courage and defiance while being held captive in Vietnam cost him his life. Today it is my great privilege to recognize his extraordinary sacrifices by awarding him the Medal of Honor.

I appreciate Secretary Anthony Principi, the Secretary from the Department of Veteran Affairs, for being here. Thank you for coming, Tony. I appreciate Senator George Allen and Congressman Jim Moran. I want to thank Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and General Pete Pace, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Army General Eric Shinseki—thank you for coming, sir. I appreciate David Hicks being here. He's the Deputy Chief of Chaplains for the United States Army.

I want to thank the entire Versace family for coming, three brothers and a lot of relatives, brothers, Dick and Mike and Steve, who's up here on the stage with me today. I appreciate the classmates and friends and supporters of Rocky for coming. I also want to thank the previous Medal of Honor recipients who are here with us today. That would be Harvey Barnum and Brian Thacker and Roger Donlon. Thank you all for coming.

Rocky grew up in this area and attended Gonzaga College High School, right here in Washington, DC. One of his fellow soldiers recalled that Rocky was the kind of person you only had to know a few weeks before you felt like you'd known him for years. Serving as an intelligence adviser in the Mekong Delta, he quickly befriended many of the