

Montgomery's 'Fighter Ace' honored with Congressional Gold Medal

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America's most distinguished "Fighter Ace" pilots, including Montgomery's retired Lt. Gen. Charles "Chick" Cleveland, will receive one of the highest honors Wednesday as they are awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in a special ceremony in Washington, D.C.

Cleveland left his home late Tuesday afternoon to catch a flight for the nation's capital.

"I'm feeling wonderful! This is truly exciting!" Cleveland said. "This will be the most aces we've had out for an aces gathering, so they are all very excited."

About 35 aces are expected to attend the event scheduled at 2 p.m. Wednesday inside Emancipation Hall. The event will be televised on C-SPAN and streamed live online at www.speaker.gov/live.

America's "Fighter Aces" earned the title "ace" by downing at least five enemy aircraft in combat during either World War I, WWII, the Korean War or the Vietnam War. Cleveland earned his "ace" status as a pilot in the Korean War, in which he shot down five enemy aircraft.

Now, Cleveland, 87, after retiring from the Air Force at Maxwell Air Force Base as commander of Air University, is president of the American Fighter Aces Association and joins the nation's remaining aces as they are presented a single Congressional Gold Medal for their service. Of the 1,450 pilots who earned the "aces" title, only 77 are living today. About half are schedule to participate in the ceremony.

Cleveland was instrumental in organizing the medal presentation and contacting the nation's aces to gather for the occasion.

U.S. Rep. Martha Roby helped advance the bill to honor the fighter aces, which was passed in May 2014.

"Gen. Cleveland is an American hero, but he's also our Montgomery hero," said Roby. "Gen. Cleveland has an incredibly distinguished service record, which is evidenced by his distinction as the 'best of the best' fighter pilots.

"His command of Air University and subsequent support of Maxwell even to this day is what makes him such an important part of the Montgomery community," Roby added. "I will be proud to be a part of the Congressional Gold Medal ceremony honoring Gen. Cleveland and his fellow fighter aces, and I encourage everyone to watch."

Cleveland is working hard to keep the stories of the aces alive for future generations through publishing the book, "Wings of Valor," published by the Naval Institute Press. Cleveland has created a Kickstarter account online to raise money for production and distribution costs. Donations can also be made at <http://wingsofvalor.us/>.
