

Tuskegee Airman who loved telling stories dies at 88

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In May, William H. Cornish was brought to tears as a Tuskegee Airmen representative recognized him at his home for his time spent as part of the country's first all-black unit of airmen during World War II.

"It's a great feeling to be able to live long enough to get this medal," Mr. Cornish said, receiving a replica of the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian award bestowed by Congress.

At that time, he suffered from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and used an oxygen tank.

Mr. Cornish died Tuesday. He was 88.

"He was a wonderful person," said Mr. Cornish's only child, Pearl Carter of Lexington. "He had a good heart."

A Lexington native, Cornish was treasurer of the Usher Board at Consolidated Baptist Church. He had retired years ago from Vaughn's Tobacco Warehouse in Lexington, where he was a truck driver, Carter said.

Mr. Cornish loved telling stories, his daughter said.

Bill McAtee delivered meals to Mr. Cornish's home for about two years as part of Lexington's Meals On Wheels program. Mr. Cornish told McAtee stories about his days as a ground-support refueler and mechanic as part of the 332nd Fighter Group of the Tuskegee Airmen, including a story about the time he flew over an erupting Mount Vesuvius with a pilot.

On Thursday, McAtee said Mr. Cornish had struggled in health but was always cheerful.

"He had a good outlook on life," McAtee said.

Ron Spriggs, executive director of the Ron Spriggs Exhibit of Tuskegee Airmen Inc., visited Mr. Cornish on a recent Saturday. Mr. Cornish signed a small replica of a road sign that has been placed in various locations on Interstate 75 going into Fayette County. The signs mark the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail.

The smaller sign will eventually be placed among Tuskegee memorabilia at the aviation museum at Blue Grass Airport.