

Andrew Maples, Jr. Update

From the Orange *Review*:

Honoring an Orange County hero: Capt. Maples portrait unveiled in O.C. Courthouse

By Jeff Poole
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“Following the June 26, 1944, death of Capt. Andrew Maples Jr., President Harry S. Truman commended the Orange County pilot and Tuskegee Airman by saying, ‘He stands in the unbroken line of patriots who dared to die that freedom might live and grow and increase its blessings. Freedom lives and through it he lives—in a way that humbles the undertakings of most men.’

“The Honorable Judge David Franzén invoked the words of the 33rd president Saturday afternoon in the historic Orange County Courthouse as a portrait of Capt. Maples was unveiled among family, friends, veterans, local officials and members of the Orange County African American Historical Society.

“The portrait, painted by Gordonsville artist Becky Parrish, is the first of eight new portraits added to the historic courtroom’s walls and the first since the 1970s.

“According to Orange County African American Historical Society historian Zann Nelson, Maples was born in 1920 into a family that revered duty and patriotism. His father, Andrew Maples Sr., served in the U. S. Army in France in WWI, was promoted to sergeant, was wounded in action and was awarded the “Victory Cross” by the French government.

“Upon returning home, he married Julia Michie and they moved from New York City to Philadelphia to Orange, where the Maples family settled on Church Street (near the historic roadside marker honoring him at the rear of Taylor Park).

“In an effort to get their son a better education, the Maples sent Andrew to live with relatives in Washington, D.C., where he graduated from Armstrong High School in 1939. For the next three years, he attended the Hampton Institute where he obtained his civilian pilot training and was the first African-American to fly a plane from the Hampton base. As war loomed, he transferred to the Tuskegee Institute and the Army Advanced Flying School, graduating as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air Corps in January 1943.

“Deployed with the 301st Fighter Squadron in Europe, Maples was promoted to first lieutenant and assigned command of a P-47 Thunderbolt fighter aircraft.

“On June 26, 1944, Lt. Maples was leading a group of Thunderbolts from their base at Ramitelli Airfield in Italy, on a bomber escort mission into Hungary. But his fighter developed a mechanical problem over the Adriatic Sea, Nelson said. Maples radioed that he planned to bail out when his aircraft reached a safe altitude. However, no parachute was spotted and a search revealed no sign of Lieutenant Maples or his plane, she said. He was listed as missing in action. During that time, he was promoted to captain and awarded the Air Medal. A year later, the Army declared him killed in action and posthumously awarded him the Purple Heart, prompting the president’s remarks.

“Since Capt. Maples’ body was never found, the family couldn’t have a proper funeral nor a formal military service, Nelson noted at Saturday’s event.

“That is until Saturday afternoon outside the Orange County Courthouse. There, members of Culpeper VFW Post 2524 offered a 21-gun salute, performed military “Taps” and honored Maples’ sisters, Doris Maples Walker and Pauline H. Cornelius, with a tri-folded flag, thanking them for his service to the nation.

“Inside the courtroom, Maples’ portrait sits behind the bench near the portrait of fourth U.S. President James Madison (immediately behind the judge), between Gov. James Barbour and fellow Orange County resident U.S. Navy Lt. Severn Marcellus Nottingham Jr., who was killed in action southeast of Savo Island in the Pacific theater during World War II.

“As a prelude to the unveiling, Judge Franzén read an order into the court record “in recognition of the exemplary conduct and sacrifices of native son Andrew Maples Jr.,” including President Truman’s remarks. “It is hereby ordered, adjudged and decreed that the court has caused a portrait of Capt. Andrew Maples Jr. to be prominently displayed in its historic courtroom among other distinguished citizens of Orange County, reflecting the diversity of our community and demonstrating that we, the people, are strengthened by that diversity and of which, by celebrating, we can be justly proud,” the judge said.

“Maryland 4th District Congressman Rep. Anthony Brown, who married into the Maples family, said he was so moved by the day’s event, he felt compelled to commend Capt. Maples’ legacy.

“What I’ve come to learn about Capt. Maples is he came from a long line in his family that served in the military to defend the values and freedoms we enjoy in this country,” he said, citing the military service of Capt. Maples’ brothers, Adolphus, and Harold, who was a Tuskegee Airman as well. Three other Maples brothers, Junious, Leroy and Roger, served during the 1950s.

“ ‘It’s a family that reveres patriotism, honor and country,” Rep. Brown said. “His service would not be possible without the buffalo soldiers on the western frontier in the 1800s, nor the Harlem Hellfighters of World War I. As a former Army aviator, I know my service would not have been possible, certainly not in the cockpit, had it not been for Capt. Andrew Maples and the hundreds, if not thousands of Tuskegee aviators and navigators who proved that regardless of race,

geography, ethnicity or background, that all of us can and should have an opportunity to serve our country.'

"Offering remarks from the bench, Doris Maples Walker described her brother as 'The big brother you wanted to have.'

" 'When Zann first contacted me, I didn't believe what she was saying,' Walker said. 'My family is truly honored today because Orange County has stepped up and I say 'thank you, thank you, thank you.' "

