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'Memphis State Legacy Eight' and Air Force vet Luther C. McClellan dies at 83 as a pioneer to integrate what became The University of Memphis

In 1962, Mr. McClellan was the first Black person to graduate from UofM.

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (July 14, 2024) — The University of Memphis is honoring the life and legacy of a trailblazer, Memphis State Eight member Luther C. McClellan, upon the news of his passing July 12. McClellan was 83.

"The University of Memphis is deeply saddened by the passing of Luther C. McClellan," said UofM President Bill Hardgrave. "As a member of the Memphis State Eight and the first African American graduate at our institution, Luther was a trailblazer for our university and a beloved member of the Tiger Family. His perseverance paved the way for many and allowed the UofM to become the institution it is today. He will be missed and forever remembered."



Luther C. McClellan at the dedication of the Alumni Mall, which was named in honor of him, in September 2021. (Photo/Courtesy: University of Memphis)

McClellan was the first Black person to graduate from Memphis State University, in 1962. As a member of the Memphis State Eight — the first group of African American students admitted to the University in 1959 — he helped integrate Memphis State University. McClellan, who graduated from Manassas High School in Memphis, earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics and later received his MBA from Monmouth University in New Jersey.

recalled at the 60-year commemoration of the Memphis State Eight's integration of the University in 2019. "I just challenged myself to focus on doing my work. If another student wanted to speak to me, that was fine with me. That was my stance on it, and it worked for me. My classmates weren't going to buck the system and become my friend, but I do think they knew that all people were created equal."

Along with McClellan, the other members of the Memphis State

Eight are Rose Blakney-Love, Eleanor Gandy, Sammie Johnson, Marvis Kneeland Jones, Bertha Rogers Looney, Ralph Prater and John Simpson. Johnson passed away in 2011; Gandy and Love in 2017; Simpson in 2019; Jones and Prater in 2022.

At the 2021 dedication of the Alumni Mall now bearing his name, McClellan spoke of the strides made at the UofM since he had graduated. "I applaud the University of

Memphis for all of its efforts to make sure we are integrated, diverse and that all students get a fair opportunity to succeed," McClellan said. "I am so proud to be a graduate."

After graduation, McClellan became an Air Force officer specializing in radar countermeasures. He worked as a computer expert at the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and as a program director at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

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He retired in 1998 with more than 30 years of experience working for the FAA and Air Force. He also retired from the Air Force Reserves as a major.

The Black Alumni Chapter of the UofM Alumni Association awards the Luther C. McClellan Scholarship annually to as many as three deserving minority students. This award recognizes students who have shown outstanding academic achievement, leadership qualities and community involvement.



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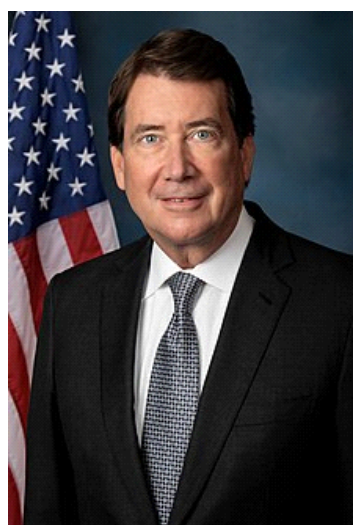
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Sens. Hagerty and Blackburn urge Air Force to make McGhee Tyson ANG Base the main operating base for KC-46 aircraft

WASHINGTON—United States Senators Bill Hagerty (R-TN) and Marsha Blackburn (R-TN), along with the entire Tennessee delegation, sent a letter to Department of the Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall III urging him to make the McGhee Tyson Air National Guard (ANG) Base outside of Knoxville, Tennessee, the seventh main operating base for the KC-46 Pegasus.



U.S. Sen. Bill Hagerty

"The dedicated personnel at McGhee Tyson ANG Base in Tennessee have steadfastly served the United States for over 68 years and have established themselves as one of the most decorated air refueling units in the history of the U.S. Air Force having achieved 16 Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards," the members of Congress wrote. "Tennessee's 134th Air Refueling Wing boasts over \$200M of infrastructure improvements and over 100 percent end strength over the last decade making them uniquely qualified to receive and

employ the KC-46. Further, we understand that the ANG currently makes up approximately 40 percent of the U.S. Air Force's KC-135 air refueling capability. This selection also pursues proportional distribution of next generation air refueling capability within the ANG. McGhee Tyson ANG Base/134th Air Refueling Wing is the only ANG base that can employ the KC-46. Please see sports page 3



U.S. Senator Marsha Blackburn is shown here with airmen of Tennessee's 134th Air Refueling Wing. (Photo/Courtesy: Sen. Blackburn office)

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