

America's "Top Gun" Fighter Aces – An Endangered Species

April 7, 2015 - DENVER--America's "Top Gun" Fighter Aces are the newest endangered species.

These fighter pilots, who earned Ace status by destroying at least five enemy aircraft during aerial combat missions in both World Wars, Korea and Vietnam, are a vanishing breed and most likely an endangered species.

"If there's an elite among fighter pilots, it's these men. It's probably unlikely, based on the lack of today's air-to-air combat, that there will be another designated Ace," said retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Charles "Chick" Cleveland, president of the American Fighter Aces Association. "They helped shorten the wars and saved lives." Cleveland is a Korean War Ace who flew F-86 Sabre jets in MiG Alley.

The Aces, as a group, will be bestowed the Congressional Gold Medal during a ceremony in the U.S. Capitol on May 20. Of the estimated 60,000 fighter pilots who flew combat missions, only 1,450 achieved Ace status.

"Today, there are less than 80 of them still with us," Cleveland said. "A new book is being created to preserve their legacy so young Americans can be inspired and educated about their actions. This will be America's book."

Author Peter Collier and documentary photographer Nick Del Calzo term this project as "a race against time" because of the advanced age of these heroic Aces. Nearly all of them are in their 90s. Due to their high mortality rate, other professional photographers were recruited to assure that as many of the living Aces as possible can be included in this commemorative book.

Del Calzo and Collier previously collaborated on the award-winning, New York Times best seller, *Medal of Honor: Portraits of Valor Beyond The Call of Duty*, now in its third edition. This book features similar portraits of Medal of Honor recipients and their courageous stories.

A Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign has been launched to enshrine these men in a photographic book entitled, *Wings of Valor: Honoring America's Fighter Aces*. As the May 3 Kickstarter deadline nears, General Cleveland and his fellow Aces are hopeful Americans will respond by pledging \$10 or more to help reach the \$65,000 goal to produce the book's content and assure that these Aces will be fully recognized. Go to www.Kickstarter.com, "Wings of Valor."

"These men are disappearing, but must not be forgotten," Cleveland said.

Website & Photo Gallery: www.wingsofvalor.us

Contact: Dick Schneider, media@wingsofvalor.us, (303) 986-0123