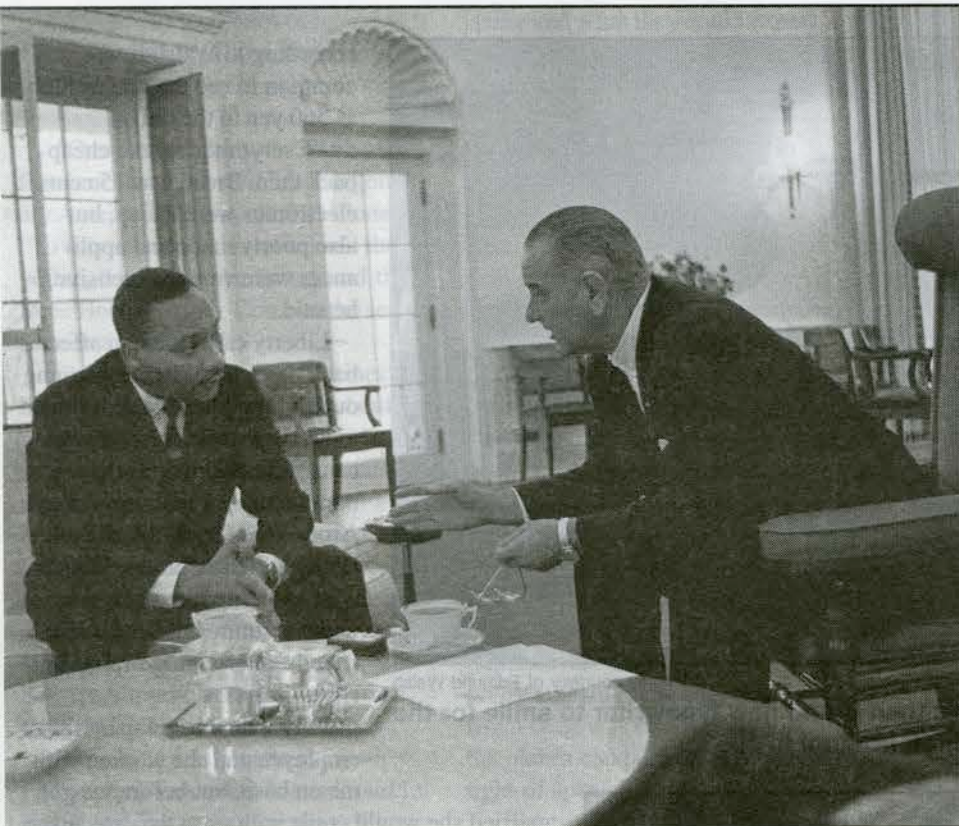




Photos courtesy of NARA

'Dream' lives in Iwakuni

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Combat Correspondent

The third Monday of January is declared a federal holiday for one reason, the birthday of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

In the mid '50s and '60s, King played one of the most pivotal roles in the civil rights movement as a leader and a voice. But his voice was forever silenced on April 4, 1968.

Born in 1929 in the southern city of Atlanta, in a state where segregation laws were strongly in effect, King witnessed the mistreatment of humans at an early age.

Southern segregation laws were in full force after the Civil War. These laws were known as the Jim Crow system, named after a 1830s minstrel show character that depicted and embodied negative stereotypes of blacks.

The system was comprised of unjust rules that included signs in public places displaying words such as "whites only" or "colored only." Blacks were not able to integrate or sit in the same seats with caucasians in restaurants, trains, theaters, ballparks and buses. The laws segregated blacks and restricted African American rights in almost every conceivable way.

King was the eldest son of Alberta Williams King and Martin Luther King Sr., a Baptist minister. He himself was ordained as a Baptist minister at the adolescent age of 18. In academics, King progressed through Morehouse College in Atlanta, Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, and at Boston University. At this point in his life, the young King became increasingly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent strategies for social change. King was then crowned with a doctorate in systematic theology in 1955.

That same faithful year, on Dec. 1, proved to be

the turning point in civil rights. Rosa Parks, a leading member of the National Association for the Advancement of People (NAACP), was riding on a bus down one of the streets. The bus had concurrent stops. An Anglo passenger boarded the car. Before the bus went to the next stop, the driver stood from his seat towards Parks and ordered her to get to the back of the bus.

The "colored" were often referred to, by segregationists, as sitting on one of the bus or in designated seats were all occupied. Hence the bus, by law, must surrender to the police, arrested, jailed, and convicted of violating laws.

This, obviously, motivated King to direct a bus boycott in Montgomery, Ala. The blacks not taking any type of transportation buses. He was then chosen as the Montgomery Improvement Association.

The boycott lasted less than a year. In November 1956, the Montgomery buses were desegregated.

The boycott was triumphant and gave King national attention. It also inspired other activists around the South such as sit-in at establishments.

King's allusion to his ideals, that corresponded with Christian brotherhood and love, made a positive impression on the South. Despite his growing reputation as a man, King's home was bombed in his life, nor was it the last.

In 1963, King and other black leaders organized the March on Washington, one of the greatest demonstrations in America's history. He spoke to a crowd of more than 250,000 people, dramatizing the plight of black Americans.

Standing before the Lincoln Memorial, King gave his "I Have a Dream" address, touching the souls of Americans. For his outstanding contributions, King received more than 300 honors and awards. In 1964, he received the world's highest honor, the Nobel Peace Prize.

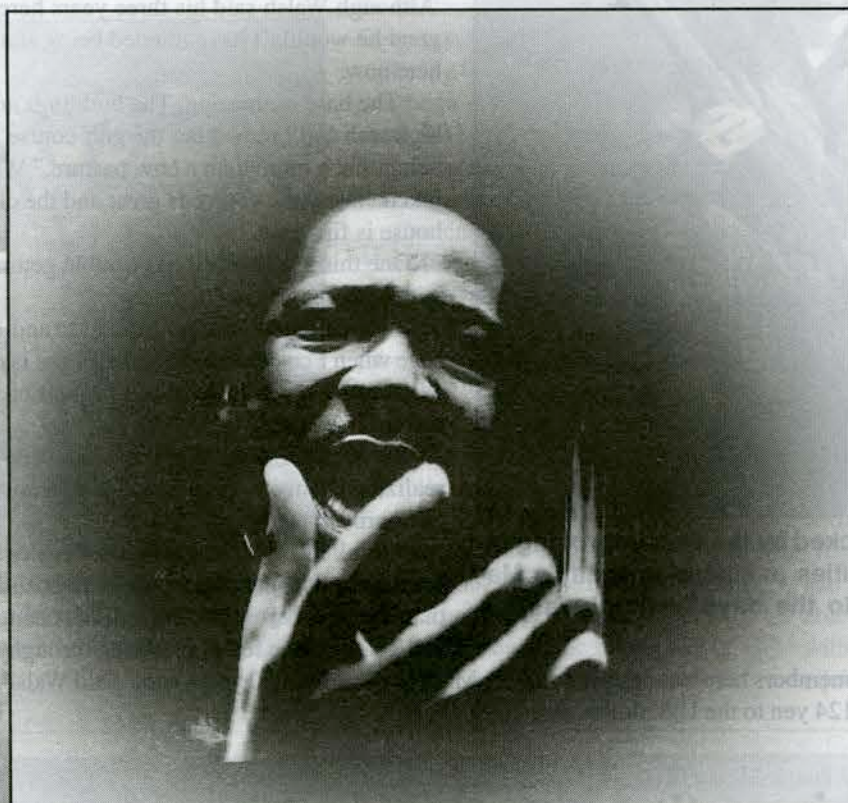
King was assassinated as he was walking with friends on the balcony of Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, 1968. In 1977, the United States honored him with the nation's highest civilian award, the Medal of Freedom. Jan. 1986 marked the beginning of the official national observance of King's birthday.

Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni will observe King's birthday Monday. All aboard the Station should take time to reflect on King's vision and "dream," said Gunnery Sgt. Glenn E. Griggs, Station equal opportunities advisor.

"Whether you are an African-American, Hispanic, Native American, Caucasian or Asian-American, you are part of that great dream King had for America," said Griggs.

"I don't know much about Dr. King besides the obvious and what he fought for, but from what I do know, I am grateful. He didn't just help African-Americans, he helped the human race as a whole," said Lance Cpl. Kellen Chumley, Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron videographer.

While Marines and Sailors enjoy a delightful day off, they should reflect and think about the sacrifices of others and appreciate what it means to them, said Griggs.



Jan. 15, 1929
Born in Atlanta

June 1948
Receives bachelor's degree from Morehouse College

June 1951
Receives bachelor's degree from Crozer Theological Seminary

September 1954
Becomes minister at Dexter Ave. Baptist Church in Atlanta

June 1953
Marries Coretta Scott

May 1955
Receives Ph.D. from Boston University

August 1957
Becomes president of the Southern Leadership Conference

September 1958
"Stride toward Freedom" published

January 1960
Becomes co-pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta

October 1962
Arrested at sit-in in Atlanta

April 1963
Gives "I Have a Dream" speech at a march on Washington

December 1964
Awarded Nobel Peace Prize

March 1965
Organizes Voter Registration March from Selma to Montgomery, Ala.

August 1965
Young Rights Act signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson

April 4, 1968
Killed by sniper at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tenn.

November 1983
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday instituted