

Tubman posthumously honored as general

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USA TODAY

Abolitionist and Underground Railroad leader Harriet Tubman, the first woman in the U.S. to lead an armed military operation during a war, was posthumously commissioned as a one-star general in the Maryland National Guard on Monday.

Maryland Gov. Wes Moore, along with members of the state's National Guard, and Maj. Gen. Janeen Birckhead awarded Tubman the rank of brigadier general during a Veterans Day ceremony, according to the governor's office. During the ceremony, the Maryland National Guard and Moore officially recognized Tubman for her military service to the U.S. and Maryland.

The commemoration, held at the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park and Visitor Center, was attended by dozens of people including Tubman's descendants, military members, community members and local leaders. Birckhead said the occasion was "long overdue," noting that it was due to a state law passed earlier this year that authorizes the governor to make certain posthumous awards.

"Harriet Tubman should be revered always for risking her life and her own freedom and the cause of justice for the enslaved," Birckhead said at the ceremony. "Now we make the grassroots honor, in a formal way, to proclaim that Harriet Tubman was courageous, she sacrificed, she's a skillful leader and she advanced the survival of a nation."

Moore called Monday's ceremony not just a "great day" for Maryland but



The Harriet Tubman Monument in Newark, N.J., was unveiled in 2023. Tubman was the first woman in the U.S. to lead an armed military operation during a war.

EDUARDO MUNOZ/REUTERS FILE

for the entire U.S.

Tubman, who was born into slavery in Maryland, had escaped in 1849 to Philadelphia – where she lived as a free woman. But Tubman later returned to Maryland at least 13 times to rescue her family and as many as 70 enslaved people in total through the Underground Railroad, a network of escape routes and safe houses organized by Black and white abolitionists. If she had been caught, she would've faced physical punishment and been sold back into slavery in the Deep South due to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law.

"There is nobody who defined 'leave no one behind' in the way that Gen. Tubman left no one behind," Moore said during the ceremony.

Tubman became Union scout

"Deeply admired by abolitionists in

the North, Tubman became a trusted friend and advisor to many, which earned her a role in the Union Army as a scout, spy, nurse, and confidante of generals," according to the Harriet Tubman Byway website.

The U.S. Army and historians have credited Tubman as the first woman to "lead a combat regiment when she spearheaded a Union Army raid during the Civil War."

The commissioning proclamation on Monday was received by Tubman's great-great-great-grandniece Ernestine "Tina" Martin Wyatt, who underscored Tubman's legacy and paralleled her to veterans. "Aunt Harriet was one of those veterans informally," Wyatt said at the ceremony. "She gave up any rights that she had obtained for herself to be able to fight for others."

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