

CULTURAL  
AWARENESS



# OBSERVANCE

## MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY

Each year, on the third Monday in January, the Department of Defense joins the nation in honoring the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

King is remembered as America's preeminent advocate of nonviolence and a leader of the Civil Rights Movement. While others were fighting for equality by "any means necessary," he used the power of words and acts of nonviolent resistance. King's achievements are well documented.

However, few people know of the history and connection he had with the island of Bimini in the Bahamas. King chose Bimini because it was where his friend, politician and civil rights reformer Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. had a home. Artist Tommy Saunders worked as a personal assistant for King during his visits.

Meanwhile, Tommy's older brother Ansil, a boat builder and champion bonefisher, became King's guide and friend. He would take King to secluded parts of the island where he could be alone with his thoughts. Like King, Ansil Saunders is a deeply religious man, and the two quickly bonded over their faith.

During one visit to Bimini, King wrote notes for his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, which he gave in Oslo in 1964.

In 1968, King returned to the island. Saunders, again, found a quiet place on Bonefish Creek, where King would write his final speech, *"I've Been to the Mountaintop."*

Saunders shared in a later interview, his conversation with King. He said, *"He told me 'You know, Ansil, I don't think I'll make 40 years old.'" He went on to share, "We didn't have time to fish because he wanted to just write at that time. He came to Bimini to feel peaceful."*

On April 4, 1968, days after returning from Bimini, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

The Defense Department recognizes that freedom, equality, and inclusion are true force multipliers and imperative to the national defense and the strength of our nation. Dr. King recognized the power of service. Observing MLK Day through service continues the DoD's mission of promoting change and building communities.