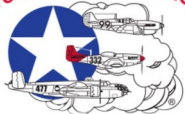


TUSKEGEE AIRMEN, INC.



THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

A Condensed History

Daniel Haulman, PhD
Air Force Historical Research Agency
April 27, 2016



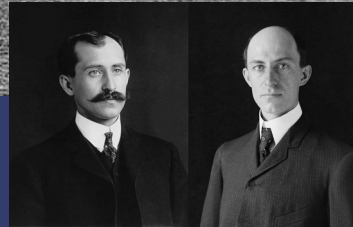
Origins of Military Aviation

1903: Wright Brothers invent the airplane

1909: U.S. Army acquires first aircraft & pilots

No African American military pilots for 30+ years.

Racial segregation policies blocked participation



Key Point: Racism prevented Black Americans from serving as military pilots until WWII.

The "Tuskegee Experiment"

A Military "Experiment"

The War Department designed this program to test whether Black men could be trained as military combat pilots.

Many officials expected — and wanted — the program to fail, reinforcing racist beliefs that Black Americans lacked the intelligence and temperament to operate complex aircraft.

The Stakes

These men had to prove their basic humanity before they could prove their combat excellence. Every flight, every mission, every victory carried the weight of an entire race's aspirations.

The cadets who entered Tuskegee were among the most qualified applicants in the entire Army Air Corps — many held college degrees and had already earned civilian pilot licenses.

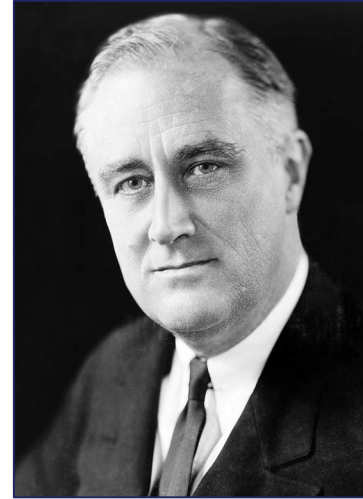
They were set up to fail — and instead, they changed the course of American history.



Breaking the Barrier

1940: FDR fulfills campaign promise African Americans allowed to train as military pilots

March 1941: 99th Pursuit Squadron activated
Later renamed 99th Fighter Squadron



Chief Anderson & Eleanor Roosevelt

The Flight That Changed Everything

March 1941, Tuskegee, Alabama

Charles "Chief" Anderson, the chief civilian flight instructor at Tuskegee, took First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt on an aerial tour.

Her enthusiastic reaction and the widely published photos helped secure critical political and public support for the training program.

Anderson trained hundreds of cadets and is known to Tuskegee Airmen as "the beginning" of their journey into military flight.



One flight. One photo. One First Lady. It helped launch a revolution in military aviation.

Civilian Pilot Training Program

1939

Tuskegee Institute joined the federal CPTP — one of six HBCUs selected to train Black civilian pilots.

124 Black Pilots

In 1940, only 124 African American pilots existed in the entire nation. CPTP graduates formed the core of qualified military applicants.

Access = Opportunity

Structured training programs created the pipeline of qualified Black pilots who shattered every expectation. Without the CPTP, there may have been no Tuskegee Airmen.

The CPTP proved that when given access, Black Americans excelled in aviation.



Training at Tuskegee

Primary Training

- Moton Field
- Biplanes on grass runways
- Mostly African American instructors

Advanced Training

- Tuskegee Army Air Field
- Majority white instructors
- Commanded by Col. Noel F. Parrish





Graduation & Pilot Numbers

Fewer than 50% completed advanced training
Nearly 1,000 African American pilots earned wings

Roles included:

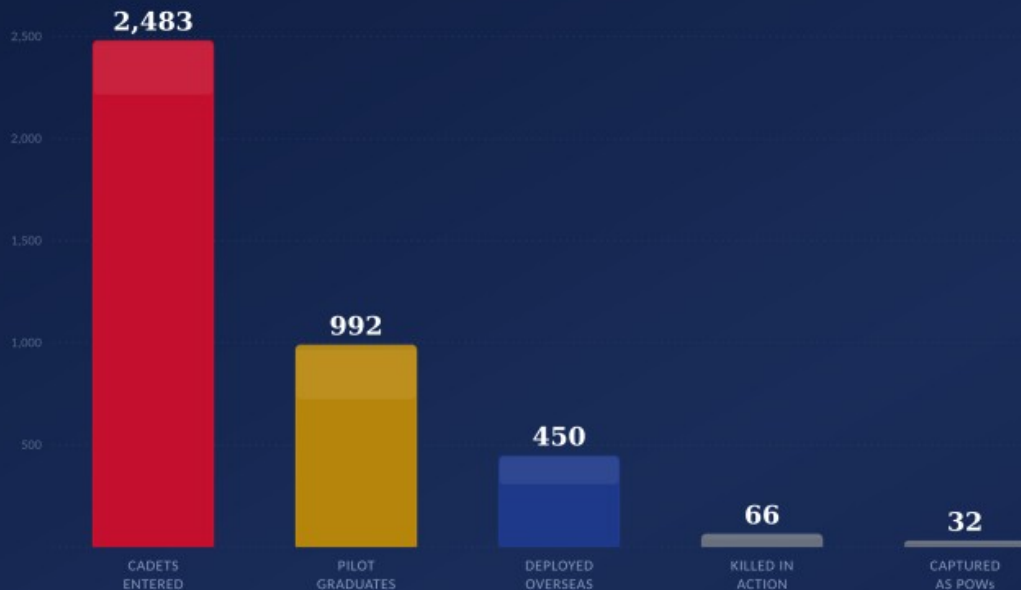
- Fighter, bomber, liaison, instructor

Navy & Marine Corps had no Black pilots during WWII



TUSKEGEE AIRMEN OF WWII

★ *Aviation Cadets Entered vs. Pilot Graduates | 1941–1946*



COMBAT LEGACY

- ♦ **992** Pilots Graduated
- ♦ **~14,000** Total Personnel Trained
- ♦ **15,000+** Individual Sorties Flown
- ♦ **150+** Distinguished Flying Crosses
- ♦ **112** Enemy Aircraft Shot Down
- ♦ **3** Distinguished Unit Citations



"Red Tails" – 332nd Fighter Group | 99th Fighter Squadron | 477th Bombardment Group



Major Combat Units

332nd Fighter Group

4 fighter squadrons

477th Bombardment Group

4 bomber squadrons



First Combat Deployment (1943)

99th Fighter Squadron deployed overseas

- Served in North Africa, Sicily, Italy
- Flew P-40 aircraft
- Mission: Tactical air support





Expansion of the 332nd Fighter Group

Deployed to Italy (1944)

- Initially flew P-39 aircraft
- 99th reassigned to 332nd
- **Only WWII fighter group with four squadrons**





The "Red Tails"

Assigned to Fifteenth Air Force

- Escorted B-17 and B-24 bombers
- Flew P-47 and P-51 aircraft
- **Distinctive red-painted tails**





Escort Mission Performance

179

Bomber Escort
Missions

27

Total Bombers
Lost

46

Other Groups'
Average Losses

Bombers lost on only 7 missions

*While the "never lost a bomber" myth is inaccurate,
their performance was still exceptional*



Berlin Mission (March 24, 1945)

Longest Fifteenth Air Force mission

- Escorted bombers to Berlin
- Shot down Me-262 jets
- Notable pilot: Roscoe Brown





Additional Combat Achievements

Combat Operations:

- Strafing missions
- Destroyed ground & sea targets
- 112 enemy aircraft shot down

Honors & Recognition:

- 96 Distinguished Flying Crosses
- Several near-aces





The 477th Bombardment Group

- Flew B-25 bombers
- Five-man crew
- Trained for Pacific deployment
- **Never deployed overseas**





Freeman Field Mutiny

Over 100 Black officers arrested

- Protested segregated officers' club
- All later exonerated

Benjamin O. Davis Jr. appointed commander



A major civil rights action within the military



Leadership & Legacy Figures



**Benjamin O.
Davis Jr.**

First Black General
U.S. Air Force



**Benjamin O.
Davis Sr.**

First Black General
U.S. Army



**Daniel "Chappie"
James**

First Black
Four-Star General

Col. Charles McGee

One of the Most Decorated Tuskegee Airmen

409 combat missions across three wars:

WWII — Fighter pilot, 332nd Fighter Group

Korea — Flew 100 combat missions

Vietnam — Flew 173 combat missions

Honorary promotion to Brigadier General (2019)

Passed away January 16, 2022, at age 102

Dedicated his post-military life to youth aviation education and mentorship



"Tuskegee Airmen paved the way... now it is your turn." — Col. Charles McGee



The Ground Personnel

Nearly 1,000

Pilots

Over 14,000

Support Personnel

Support roles included:

- Mechanics, armorers, intelligence, clerks, nurses, and many others

Pilots depended on a massive support network

Women of the Tuskegee Experience

While women could not serve as air cadets, they were essential to the program's success:

Mildred Hemmons Carter (1921–2011)

First civilian hired by Army Air Corps at TAAF. Earned her pilot's license in 1941 through CPTP. Bulldozed trees for the airstrip, created base documents, rigged parachutes, and performed admin duties throughout the war.

Parachute Riggers

Three women specifically trained cadets in parachute maintenance — vital to every pilot's life.

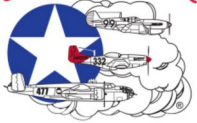
**Mechanics, Guards,
Control Tower Operators,
Nurses & Support Staff**

Women served across every
support function at Tuskegee



The Tuskegee story is not complete without the women who sustained the program.

TUSKEGEE AIRMEN, INC.



Impact on Desegregation

1943-45

Demonstrated equal capability in combat

1947

Air Force established as separate branch

1948

Truman ends military segregation

Their performance influenced broader civil rights progress



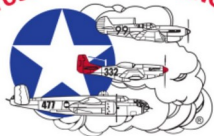
Congressional Gold Medal (2007)

Awarded collectively to all Tuskegee Airmen

- Ceremony led by President George W. Bush
- Recognized their "Double Victory":
 - Victory over fascism abroad
 - Victory over racism at home



TUSKEGEE AIRMEN, INC.



The Tuskegee Airmen

- Broke racial barriers
- Proved combat excellence
- Accelerated desegregation
- Left a lasting legacy

Their courage changed America