

Fact Sheet

Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.

Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. (TAI) is a 501(c)(3), non-profit, national organization existing primarily to motivate and inspire young Americans to become participants in our nation's society and its democratic process. It also supports young men and women pursuing excellence, paying special attention to those interested in careers in aviation, technology and aerospace. TAI is dedicated to keeping alive the history, achievements, and importance of the original Tuskegee Airmen.

There are currently 54 active chapters of TAI located in major cities and military installations throughout the United States. The membership of TAI consists of civilians, veterans, and military personnel from all branches of the service.

Mission

TAI strives to increase understanding of the "Tuskegee Experience" by:

- Honoring the accomplishments and perpetuating the history of the men and women who participated in the "Tuskegee Experience" as air and ground crew operations and support in the Army Air Corps during World War II
- Introducing young people across the nation to the world of aviation and science through local and national initiatives such as Young Eagles and TAI youth programs
- Providing awards to deserving individuals, groups and corporations whose deeds support TAI's mission, goals and objectives

Location

TAI is headquartered in Tuskegee, Alabama, where the training of black military pilots during World War II began.

The Tuskegee Institute's Division of Aeronautics, Moton Field, and Tuskegee Army Air Field (TAAF) where the pilots received subsequent and basic training, were the only primary flight facilities for black pilot candidates in the U.S. Army Air Corps (Army Air Forces) during World War II. Moton Field, named for Robert Russa Moton, second president of Tuskegee Institute, was built between 1940 and 1942.

Brief History

The Tuskegee Airmen were dedicated, determined men and women who enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps or served as civilian support staff in the “Tuskegee Experience.”

Three government initiatives occurred between 1938 and 1940 that were instrumental in paving the way for blacks to participate in the nation’s defense and to become military pilots.

In 1938, the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP), a new flight training initiative sponsored by the federal government, was launched to increase the number of civilian pilots. This program gave many black college students a chance to earn their private pilot license. Several black colleges, including Tuskegee Institute, participated in the program. However, learning to fly in the CPTP was different than becoming a military aviator in the Army Air Corps.

In 1940, Congress passed the Selective Service and Training Service Act, which was signed into law by President Franklin Roosevelt on September 16, 1940. This act, which was also known as the Burke-Wadsworth Act, was the first peace-time draft in U.S. history.

The Burke-Wadsworth Act required all American males between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five to register for the draft. The final version of the bill contained two provisions, 3(a) and 4(a), which spoke to the discrimination question:

Section 3(a) stated – “Within the limits of the quota determined...Any person regardless of race or color...shall be afforded an opportunity to volunteer for induction...and

Section 4(a) stated – “In the selection and training of men under this Act, and in the interpretation and execution of the provision of this Act, there shall be no discrimination against any person on account of race or color.”

That same year, the War Department announced that the Civil Aeronautics Authority, in cooperation with the U.S. Army, would begin development of “colored personnel” for the aviation service. This paved the way for blacks to train as pilots and vital support personnel.

These men and women came from every part of the country. Each one of them possessed a strong personal desire to serve the United States of America to the best of their ability.

The first aviation class of 13 cadets began July 19, 1941 with ground school training covering subjects such as meteorology, navigation, and instruments. Successful cadets then transferred to the segregated Tuskegee Army Air Field (TAAF) to complete the Army Air Corps pilot training. The Air Corps provided aircraft, textbooks, pilot and mechanic uniforms, and parachutes, while Tuskegee Institute provided the facilities for the aircraft and personnel. Lt. Col. Noel F. Parrish served as the base commander from 1942 to 1946.

In March 1942, five of the 13 cadets in the first class completed the Army Air Corps pilot training program, earning their silver wings and becoming the nation’s first black military pilots. They were Second Lieutenants Lemuel R. Curtis, Chalres DeBow, Mac Ross, George Spencer Roberts, and Captain Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., a West Point Academy graduate.

Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. later became leader of the Tuskegee Airmen during World War II and the first black to earn the rank of General in the U.S. Air Force.

Of the pilots who trained at Tuskegee Army Flying School, 355 served overseas with the 99th Pursuit Squadron (later the 99th Fighter Squadron) and the 332nd Fighter Group.

The 332nd Fighter Group was officially activated on October 13, 1942, at TAAF. The Group was comprised of the 301st Fighter Squadron under Lt. Charles DeBow, the 302nd Fighter Squadron under Lt. William T. Mattison, and the 100th Fighter Squadron under Lt. George Knox. (The 100th Fighter Squadron was initially commanded by Lt. Mac Ross until his appointment to Operations Officer.

In addition to training fighter pilots, Tuskegee graduated a group of twin-engine pilots. They were assigned to the 477th Bombardment Group and flew the B-25 Billy Mitchell, a twin-engine, medium bomber. The Group was activated with four squadrons; the 616th, 617th, 618th, and 619th Squadrons. However, the war against Japan ended before the 477th Group could be deployed overseas.

On June 21, 1945, Col. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. assumed command of the 477th Bombardment Group, and on June 25, 1945, the Group was re-designated the 477th Composite Group. On that same date, the 477th Composite Group gained the 99th Fighter Squadron, which became the first component of the Composite Group. In March 1946, the unit relocated to Lockbourne Army Air Base in Ohio. When the 477th was inactivated in 1947, and the inactive 332nd Fighter Group—later known as the 332nd Fighter Wing, was activated at the same base.

Throughout their training at Tuskegee, no training standards were lowered for pilots or any of the others in the fields of meteorology, intelligence, engineering, medicine, and other support positions.

From 1941 to 1946, approximately 1,000 pilots graduated from TAAF, receiving their commissions and pilot wings. The black navigators, bombardiers, and gunnery crews were trained at other selected military bases elsewhere in the U.S. Mechanics were initially trained at Chanute Air Base in Rantoul, IL, until facilities were in place at TAAF in 1942.

“Tuskegee Airmen” include men and women who were involved in the “Tuskegee Military Experiment” from 1941 to 1946. The “experiment” is now referred to as the “Tuskegee Experience” by Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.

The Tuskegee Airmen “Experience” extends up to 1949 and includes all individuals, men and women, at TAAF and other designated units or locations until desegregation of the 332nd Fighter Wing at Lockbourne Air Base, Ohio.

The term “Documented Original Tuskegee Airmen” or “DOTA” was adopted by TAI and includes vetted personnel who trained or were stationed at TAAF during the period from 1941 to 1949. These members include men, women, blacks and whites, who supported aircraft in the air

and on the ground as bombardiers, maintenance and support staff, instructors, and all other personnel.

After the War

After the war in Europe ended in 1945, the black airmen and support personnel returned to the U.S., where they continued to face racism and bigotry despite their outstanding war record.

The Tuskegee program was expanded to become the center for black aviation during World War II. TAAF continued to train new airmen until 1946.

Large numbers of black airmen chose to remain in the service, but because of segregation were limited to the 332nd Fighter Group and 477th Composite Group—later the 332nd Fighter Wing at Lockbourne Air Base. Opportunities for advancement and promotion were also very limited, which affected morale. Nonetheless, black airmen and those in other fields continued to perform superbly.

During this period, many white units were undermanned and needed qualified people but were unable to get experienced black personnel because of the segregation policy. The newly-formed U.S. Air Force began plans to integrate its units as early as 1947; however, integration did not occur until 1949.

In 1948, President Harry Truman enacted Executive Order 9981, which directed equality of treatment and opportunity to all in the U.S. armed forces. In time, this Order led to the end of racial segregation in the military and set the stage for racial integration in other areas of American society.

The “Tuskegee Experience” achieved success rather than the expected failure. This is further evidenced by the elevation of three of the pioneers to flag rank – Gen. Daniel “Chappie” James, our nation’s first black Four-Star General; Lt. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., and Maj. Lucius Theus. Davis retired as Lt. General from the U.S. Air Force in 1970 and was the senior black officer in the armed forces at that time. In 1998, President Bill Clinton awarded Gen. Davis his fourth star, advancing him to full General during this historic pinning ceremony.

The Tuskegee Airmen will live on forever in the pages of history because they accepted the challenge proudly and succeeded in proving to the world that blacks could fly. Throughout their exploits, they performed their duties with skill and determination, rising above the humiliation and indignation of racism and bigotry.

They fought two wars – one against a military enemy force overseas and another against racism at home.

Some Tuskegee Airmen Statistics

- The Tuskegee Airmen flew more than 1200 missions for the 99th, 100th, 301st, and 302nd Fighter Squadrons under the 12th Air Force.
- Civilian pilot training in the Tuskegee area began in January 1941. The first black flying unit, originally called the 99th Pursuit Squadron (now known as the 99th Flying Training Squadron) was first activated on March 22, 1941. It was designed to be a flying unit even though it did not initially have any pilots.
- The 332nd Fighter Group under the 15th Air Force flew at least 311 missions between June 1944 and May 1945.
- The 99th Fighter Squadron and the 332nd Fighter Group had a total of 112 aerial victories during World War II.
- Ninety-six Distinguished Flying Crosses were awarded to members of the 332nd Fighter Group or its squadrons.
- The 332nd Fighter Group shot down enemy aircraft on 12 missions for the 15th Air Force.
- The Tuskegee airmen flew four different types of aircraft in combat; the P-40, P-39, P-47, and P-51
- Four Tuskegee Airmen earned three aerial victory credits in one day; Joseph Elsberry, Clarence Lester, Lee Archer, and Harry Stewart.
- The 99th Fighter Squadron earned two Distinguished Unit Citations, and the 332nd Fighter Group earned one after the 99th Fighter Squadron was assigned to it.
- The Congressional Gold Medal was awarded to The Tuskegee Airmen as a group by President George W. Bush on March 29, 2007.
- The National Aviation Hall of Fame enshrined two members of Tuskegee Airmen; Col Charles McGee (2012) and Charles “Chief” Alfred Anderson (2013).

More Noteworthy Accomplishments

- The “Tuskegee Military Experiment,” now referred to as the “Tuskegee Experience” by TAI, was conducted by the U.S. War Department and the Army Air Corps from 1941 to 1946. It should not be confused with the “Tuskegee Syphilis-Experiment” that was conducted by the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) from 1932 to 1972. Both events occurred in Tuskegee, AL, but at different locations.
- In April 1941, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt traveled to Kennedy Field, owned by Tuskegee Institute, where she accepted an offer to fly with Charles A. “Chief” Anderson, a black pilot, who was the first black pilot instructor at Tuskegee. TAAF and Moton Field had not yet been completed. The First Lady’s flight catapulted the training at Tuskegee to the forefront.
- In April 1945, members of the 477th Bombardment Group at Freeman Field Airport near Seymour, IN, were arrested for trying to desegregate an “all-white” officers club. The incident resulted in the arrest of 162 black officers, some of them twice. Three were court-martialed on relatively minor charges and one was convicted. Although segregation in the military officially ended with the signing of Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948, the “Freeman Field Mutiny” was seen by some as the first step toward integration of the armed forces.
- On July 1, 1949, the 332nd Fighter Group and its three fighter squadrons; the 99th, 100th, and 301st, were inactivated. Members of those organizations were reassigned to other organizations that became racially integrated.
- In August 1945, fifteen Documented Original Tuskegee Airmen officers who were assigned to the 477th Bombardment Group at Freeman Army Airfield in Indiana received official notification during a TAI convention in Atlanta that all those involved in the incident at Freeman Field had their military records cleared of any reference to the Freeman Field Mutiny.
- On March 29, 2007, the Tuskegee Airmen as a group were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by President George W. Bush and the U.S. Congress in a ceremony inside the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol. The 300 airmen and widows in attendance received recognition for all of the estimated 16,000 to 19,000 participants in the “Tuskegee Experience.”

Some Common Misconceptions about the Tuskegee Airmen

“All African-Americans in WW II Were Tuskegee Airmen”

Many African-Americans served in the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II, but not all of them were part of the “Tuskegee Experience.” Some of those who served belonged to engineer aviation battalions that built airfields all over the world.

“Never Lost a Bomber to Enemy Aircraft” Claim (2010 TAI Position Statement)

“The results from extensive research by several independent investigators in reviewing the records of the 332nd Fighter Group, and all other fighter groups of the 15th Air Force, including the 15th Air Bomber Wings and Groups, Missing Air Crew (MAC) Reports at the Air Force Historical Research Agency, and the National Archives, revealed that some bombers were lost to enemy aircraft while being escorted by the 332nd Fighter Group during the period from June 1, 1944 to the end of the war. Regardless of these later findings, the 332nd Fighter Group had an outstanding combat record (that) inspired revolutionary reform in the (United States) Armed Forces.”

“Furthermore, it is requested that all “Tuskegee Airmen” and other Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. members and personnel discontinue making any statement which implies that the 332nd Fighter Group “Never lost a bomber to enemy aircraft.” And it is further recommended, for good public relations, they correct others that have been misinformed or who are making incorrect statements.”

Membership in TAI

Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. (TAI) was founded in Detroit, Michigan in 1972, bringing an end to nearly thirty years of anonymity of the brave men and women who were part of the “Tuskegee Experience” during World War II. TAI is a non-military, non-profit entity that exists primarily to motivate and inspire young Americans to become participants in our nation’s society and democratic process.

TAI membership is open to men and women of all races, ethnicities, religions, sexual orientation, abilities, and socio-economic status.

We invite anyone interested in helping to continue the legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen to join us by contacting a TAI chapter for more information.

Visit www.tuskegeearmen.org and click on Explore TAI to locate a chapter near you, or submit your request on the “Contact Us” page.

Donations and Planned Giving

Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. is a non-profit, 501(c)(3), tax-exempt organization. TAI accepts gifts of stock, pledges through bequests, trusts, and other planned giving.

Tuskegee Airmen

Museums and Historical Sites

There are several memorials in the U.S. dedicated to the memory of the Tuskegee Airmen—who they were, why they were, and what they accomplished during and after the adverse conditions to which they were subjected at home and abroad. These include:

Memorial Park at the Air Force Museum

Wright-Patterson AFB
Dayton, Ohio

Tuskegee Airmen Statue in the Honor Park

U. S. Air Force Academy
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior

Moton Field in Tuskegee Visitor Center
Chappie James Avenue
Tuskegee, Alabama

Tuskegee Heritage Museum

109 Westside Street
Tuskegee, Alabama

George Washington Carver Museum

Tuskegee University
Tuskegee, Alabama

Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site Quarter

The site quarter will be the last strike and the 56th and final coin in the U.S. Mint's
“America the Beautiful Quarters Program” series.

Sources:

The National Park Service; www.nps.gov

Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.; www.tuskegeeairmen.org

(Public Law 783, Sept 16, 1940; War Department Press Release; 99th Fighter Squadron summary history in the lineage and honors folder of the 99th Flying Training Squadron at the Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA), Maxwell AFB, AL)

(Alan L. Gropman, The Air Force Integrates; 1945-1964 (Washington, DC; Office of Air Force History, 1985), p. 243, and note from Dr. Gropman to Dr. Haulman, June 14, 2010)

(Maurer, Combat Squadrons of the Air Force, World War II, Maurer, Air Force Combats Units of World War II) Photos – www.nationalmuseum.af.mil

U.S. Army Center of Military History; <http://www.history.army.mil/>

Law Library of Congress; www.loc.gov/law

TAI Media Kit – General Interview Questions

- What were your motivations for joining the military?
- Did you have a choice to join the unique Tuskegee Experience or was it simply a matter of assignment?
- Did you go to Tuskegee? If so, what were your duties (primary and additional)?
- If not Tuskegee, where did you go for training and to what unit/units were you assigned?
- What were your feelings as WW II ended and the word of an integrated military was on the horizon?
- What are your thoughts on the progress that was made through the efforts of the Tuskegee Airmen?
- Is there a solid foundation in place to ensure the Tuskegee Airmen and their contributions are not forgotten?
- What was the high point of your WW II service?
- What was the low point of your WW II service?
- Who were your heroes of WW II?
- How would you describe the effectiveness of the Red Tail leadership?
- How do you feel integration affected USAF effectiveness?