



Tuskegee Airmen exhibit salutes the “Redtail Angels”

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Due to the rigid pattern of racial segregation that prevailed in the United States during World War II, 966 black military aviators were trained at an isolated training complex near the town of Tuskegee, Alabama and at Tuskegee Institute. 450 black fighter pilots under the command of Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, who was later to become the first black Air Force general, fought in the aerial war over North Africa, Sicily and Europe flying in succession P-40, P-39, P-45 and P-51 type aircraft. These gallant men flew 15,553 sorties and completed 1,578 missions with the 12th Tactical United States Army Air Force and the 15th Strategic United States Army Air Force.

“The Redtail Angels”

They were called the “Schwartzte Volgelmenschen” (Black Birdmen) by the Germans who both feared and respected them. White American bomber crews reverently referred to them as “The Redtail Angels” because of the identifying red paint on their tail assemblies and because of their reputation for not losing bombers to enemy fighters as they provided fight escort to bombing missions over strategic targets to Europe.

The 99th Fighter Squadron which had already distinguished itself over North Africa, Sicily and Anzio was joined with three more black squadrons, the 100th, the 301st and the 302nd to be designated as the 332nd Fighter group. Flying from Italian bases, they also destroyed enemy rail traffic, coast watching surveillance stations and hundreds of vehicles on air to ground strafing missions. 66 of these pilots were killed in aerial combat or accidents, while 32 were shot down and captured as prisoners-of-war.

44th Bombardment Group (M)

In January 1944 the Army Air Forces reluctantly formed the 477th Bombardment Group (medium). The men in the War Department and the major command positions in the Air Forces did not want the Tuskegee in the Army Air Forces in the first place. The men at the top were so bigoted, in fact, they supported Major General Frank Hunter, First Air Force Commander, and his 477th Bombardment Group Commander, Colonel Robert R. Selway, as these two men conspired to insult and degrade the black officers of the 477th in April 1945. As a result of the problems caused by segregation and poor leadership, this group never saw combat.

Founding of Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.

Nearly thirty years of anonymity were ended in 1972 with the founding of the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. at Detroit, Michigan. Organized as a non-military and non-profit entity, Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., exists primarily to inspire young Americans to become participants in our nation's society and its democratic process.

TAI's National Scholarship Fund and its Detroit Museum Project are currently the National Organization's high priority programs. \$30,000 in scholarship grants are being awarded across the nation, in 1995 to 26 young men and women who are pursuing careers in aviation or aerospace. The Detroit Chapter Museum Project funded from TAI's 36 Chapter Network, is located at Fort Wayne in Detroit, Michigan and serves as TAI's repository for its archives and memorabilia.

With 36 Chapters located in major cities throughout the United States, Europe and Japan, the membership of Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. is made up principally of armed forces veterans and active duty personnel representing all branches of the military. It also includes a growing number of civilians who demonstrate sincere interest in enhancing the goals and objectives of the organization. All officers and directors of the organization serve without salary or fee.

Major achievements are attributed to many of those who returned to civilian life and earned positions of leadership and respect as businessmen, corporate executives, religious leaders, lawyers, doctors, bankers, educators and political leaders.