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# The Tuskegee Experiment and Tuskegee Airmen, 1939-1949: Establishing America's Black Air Force for WW II

LeRoy F. Gillead

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**The Tuskegee Experiment and Tuskegee Airmen, 1939 - 1949: Establishing America's Black Air Force for WW II**

**By LeRoy F. Gillead**

Stapled, blue wraps with black titles. Book appears as new. It is signed by the author, a Tuskegee Airman on the back of the title page, It is also signed on the cover by Bill Campbell, who flew in WWII, Korea and Vietnam, and on the inside front cover by five more Airmen: Fred Pendleton, Ronald L. Lucas, Sam Broadnax, Arthur Harmon and Les Williams. I think all of these men are now dead.

#16610 \$150.00 1994 U-AfAmPaper

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THE TUSKEGEE  
EXPERIMENT AND  
TUSKEGEE AIRMEN  
1939 - 1949

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ESTABLISHING  
AMERICA'S  
BLACK AIR FORCE  
FOR WW II

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Kennedy Field, Union Springs, Alabama  
Moton Field, Tuskegee, Alabama  
Tuskegee Army Air Field, Tuskegee, Alabama  
Selfridge Field, Mount Clements, Michigan  
Oscoda Field, Oscoda, Michigan  
Walterboro AAF, Walterboro, South Carolina  
Mediterranean Theatre of Operations' Bases  
Godman Field, Fort Knox, Kentucky  
Atterbury Field, Columbus, Indiana  
Freeman Field, Seymour, Indiana  
Lockbourne AB, Columbus, Ohio

By Tuskegee Airman Le ROY F. GILLEAD

*Betty Campbell  
Tuskegee Airman  
By Dean Chapter*

Fred Joudleton  
P-47 Pilot

Ronald L. Lucas  
President - TAI

1996 - 1997

Gene Mandy  
CLASS 435  
MEMBER PILOT

Arthur G. Hammond  
CLASS 45-G  
47th Comp Bomb Grp.

Sam Bradrup  
CLASS 45-A  
P-47 PILOT

THE TUSKEGEE  
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By Tuskegee Airman Le ROY F. GILLEAD

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To Wayne -

Le Roy Gillead TA 1941-1949

A bit of our American history - in black.

09.21.97

Le ROY F. GILLEAD  
San Francisco

**THE TUSKEGEE EXPERIMENT  
AND TUSKEGEE AIRMEN  
1939-1949**

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THE TUSKEGEE EXPERIMENT  
AND TUSKEGEE AIRMEN  
1939-1949

INTRODUCTION

Writings on Tuskegee Airmen individually and collectively provide an opportunity for a needed broad and accurate informational paper on "The Tuskegee Experiment." Traditionally and understandably, primary emphases in prior writings have been on the combat black pilots and their units overseas (1943-1945) during World War II. Such limited recognition has been at the expense of "combat" Tuskegee Airmen fighting (1939-1949) stateside racism. This writing is an attempt to recognize the contributions of the overwhelming majority of Tuskegee Airmen in this "Experiment" fighting racism in the American Theater of Operations. Under segregated conditions "The Tuskegee Experiment" represented efforts to train blacks, primarily as civilian and Black Air Force pilots.

The initiative of this writer, a Tuskegee Airman writing about the 1939-1949 "Jim Crow" civilian and military pilot training, will link the continuity in the five phases of the "Experiment." Selective factual activities, events and accomplishments during the "Experiment" are described in each of its five phases below. This separatist and, therefore, inherently unequal "Experiment," occurred before, during and following our belligerency (1942-1945) in World War II. White civilian and military racists in the Executive Branch of government planned and implemented the "Experiment," albeit reluctantly, until it ended when the Air Force *began* integration in 1949. Because elementary, secondary and advance civilian pilot training and all military pilot training for blacks was only at Tuskegee, Alabama, this "Experiment" in aviation is referred to as "The Tuskegee Experiment." In spite of racism and the lack of adequate planning, this "Experiment" left an enviable and indelible record of success beyond anyone's expectations.

## TUSKEGEE AND TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE: BACKGROUND

Tuskegee, in Creek language, means "Little Warrior." The Creeks are one of the five Native Nations along with the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw and Seminole in the Southern Region. With the exception of the Seminole, the other four nations were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands to Oklahoma by the Regular Army in the 1830s and 1840s.

In 1881 Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), a former slave fathered by a white Christian, founded Tuskegee Institute in Macon County, Alabama, as an agricultural training center for blacks. Having grown into an educational and research center, it became Tuskegee University in 1985. Its most famous faculty member, who was also born a slave, was the late international botanist, George Washington Carver (1864-1943). He did more than anyone with the peanut and other plants for consumer and commercial use.

Tuskegee Institute was selected in 1939 by the government to conduct a flying program to train blacks as civilian pilots. A year later Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt took a flight with "Chief" Anderson, the chief black pilot in the Institute's flying program. Their picture in the plane was national news. With this background it can be understood why the name Tuskegee describes experiment in "The Tuskegee Experiment."

Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., Lieutenant General, USAF (Retired), taught Military Science at Tuskegee Institute. During his tenure (1938-1940) he rose in rank from Second Lieutenant to Captain. Again, to maintain pace with his West Point Class of 1936, he was promoted on March 1, 1942 from Captain to Lieutenant Colonel. Six days later he received his Black Air Force pilot wings as a Student Officer in the first class, 42-C. He was then unaware of his same day double promotion in rank until mid-May when he received the orders. In World War II, as Lt. Colonel and Colonel, respectively, he commanded the all black 99th Fighter Squadron and 332nd Fighter Group in combat. Then stateside, he commanded the all black 477th Composite Group and 332nd Fighter Wing. He was the first black in the Air Force promoted to the rank of Brigadier General (1954) and, in our military too, as a Major (1958) and Lieutenant General (1965) respectively, one, two and three stars. His army father (63), nine months before statutory retirement (64), was promoted in 1940 as the first black to the rank of Brigadier General. He retired in 1948 and died on Thanksgiving Day 1970 at the Great Lakes Naval Station Hospital in Illinois.

General Davis' and Tuskegee's most famous Military Science student, the late Daniel "Chappie" James, Jr. (1920-1978), became our first black four star General in 1975. At the Institute, as a non-graduate, he completed the Civilian Pilot Training Program and advanced to an instructor in the Primary Flying Training for the Army Air Forces. Next he became a Black Air Force pilot, Class 43-G, of the Tuskegee Army Flying School. After World War II he completed studies for his degree from Tuskegee Institute. "Chappie" served stateside under Colonel Davis as a bomber pilot in the 477th Composite Group and as a fighter pilot in the 332nd Fighter Wing. These accomplishments of Generals Davis and James, as well as those of other civilian and Black Air Force pilots trained at Tuskegee, reinforce the use of Tuskegee with "Experiment."

### MOBILIZATION OF THE ARMED SERVICES

Responding to the white Christian Nazis saber rattling of the mid-thirties the United States had to consider its General Mobilization Plan. These Christian Nazis were working in short deliberate order on the "final solution," the holocaust, for The [Christian] Destruction of the European Jews (by Raul Hilberg, see p.10, Table I, Canonical and Nazi Anti-Jewish Measures). At the same time, the white Christian Americans were working in long deliberate order on the blacks to perpetuate their 1619 inferior status, "their place," now as second class citizens since 1868. In America's personnel needs, blacks in the next war, as in World War I, were still to give service on a separate and inherently unequal basis in non-combat units. According to the 1925 Army War College study, blacks were "unfit for combat." Therefore, for military efficiency blacks were to be kept in "their [inferior] place" by serving exclusively in non-combat units. Blacks and supportive whites vehemently disagreed with this inherently discriminatory service of blacks during a war. The major black protagonists were the black press, labor activist A. Philip Randolph, former Federal Judge William H. Hastie, the NAACP, the National Urban League and the National Airmen's Association. Of major concern to the government was A. Philip Randolph's threat of the March on Washington Movement to protest civilian and military discrimination against blacks. It resulted in the Fair Employment Practices Committee (Executive Order 8802) for defense industries. These assertive blacks argued along with enlightened whites that blacks should be fully utilized in the event of war. Their tenacity got the attention of Senator Harry S. Truman, other Members of Congress as well as Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.

These mobilization pressures on the Roosevelt Administration caused Congress in 1939 to pass Public Law 18 (PL 18) then the Civilian Pilot Training Act. Public Law 18 was for the large-scale expansion of the Air Corps with civilian contractors, including educational institutions, to conduct Primary Flying and Ground Training for the Air Corps. The Act, sponsored by the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA), established the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) to create a reserve of civilian pilots to be called for a war emergency. In 1940 Congress amended the Selective Training and Service Act to disallow discrimination based on "race and color." Thereby, for an unspecified period, Congress provided the opportunity for blacks to volunteer and to be accepted anywhere in the United States at civilian and military ground, technical and flying training facilities. Further, acceptance was to be on a non-segregated basis in the same numerical proportion to whites. These laws, though unbeknownst to the people at the time, opened the doors to the inclusion of minorities and women in the field of commercial aviation after World War II.

## RESISTANCE TO THE TUSKEGEE EXPERIMENT

### Civilian and Military Resistance

The pervasive racist attitudes in America resisted public financing for the inclusion of blacks in civilian pilot training. Therefore, the authorities allowed discrimination based on "race and color" in order to provide the CPTP for blacks. As a result, a very limited number of CPTP facilities, six, were authorized exclusively for blacks. Among these six facilities, Tuskegee Institute became the focal point for training blacks in the CPTP. In the military, America's institutional racial resistance was strongest by the Chief of the white Air Corps, Major General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold. He supported and argued that since no blacks were in "his" white Air Corps there was no reason to train blacks to fly. The core of the prevailing military thinking was to avoid mixing blacks and whites socially. In mixing, black pilots as officers then would have authority over white enlisted men. This was clearly an untenable social and military situation. These prevailing racist attitudes gave credence to General Arnold's exclusion of blacks from military pilot training. Yet, an equally persistent group of citizen activists provided a somewhat successful counter force to this injustice.

## Executive Branch Conspiracy

As a result of the continued social pressure by black activists, the Commander-in-Chief (President Roosevelt), Secretary of War (Henry L. Stimson) and Chief of Staff (George C. Marshall) authorized General Arnold in 1940 to create a new organizational unit for blacks only. Nine non-flying units, created in the South, were called Aviation Squadrons of General Arnold's white Air Corps located in Alabama, Florida (2), Georgia (2), Louisiana (2), Mississippi and Virginia. Each Aviation Squadron had 250 black draftees commanded exclusively by white officers. This Executive Branch conspiracy was to circumvent the Congressional intent and spirit of both PL 18, for the non-segregated training of blacks as pilots in the white Air Corps, and the 1940 Amended Selective Training and Service Act disallowing discrimination based on "race and color." These newly created non-flying Aviation Squadrons were for the sole purpose of having blacks in the white Air Corps, but only as "servants." General Arnold's Aviation Squadron work assignments for blacks (e.g., barrack orderlies for white enlisted and officer students, street sweeping and cleaning, etc.) in "his" white Air Corps are reminiscent of the housekeeping, labor and odd job chores performed by black slaves for the white slave master. These Aviation Squadrons were expanded throughout the Army Air Forces and continued until two years after the white Air Force *began* integration in 1949 (with 418,347 airmen, including 57,532 officers and 21,092 Aviation Squadron blacks) when it *absorbed* the Black Air Force with less than 1000 airmen. (Gropman, 1978, 221-223, Tables I/II, Jun 1949; this paper, pages 23-24).

## Black Resistance

The hastily arranged Executive Branch of government conspiracy by its top military leaders was perceived among black activists as an additional affront to the dignity of blacks and further erosion of their civil rights. This affront precipitated another opportunity for the legal activists to continue their strategy of test cases. Particularly noteworthy was the litigation against the Executive Branch of government for its violations of the civil rights of the blacks. The test cases were painstakingly selected for their legal vulnerability by the black legal think tank led by Charles H. Houston, former Dean, Howard University Law School, Washington, D. C. Their test cases in education led to the 1954 U. S. Supreme Court unanimous school desegregation

decision reversing the 1896 Plessey v. Ferguson "separate but equal" doctrine. On January 16, 1941, with the aegis of the black legal think tank, Yancey Williams, a Howard University senior in engineering and a certified CAA pilot, filed a class action suit in the Federal Court. The suit was against the War Department challenging its rejection of the applications by blacks for aviation cadet training in the Air Corps. The *next day* the War Department announced its segregated Air Corps training for blacks as follows:

- the formation of the 99th Pursuit Squadron (activated March 22, 1941) at Chanute Field, Rantoul, Illinois, for technical training
- the Primary Flying Training (activated July 1941) at Moton Field Tuskegee Institute, Alabama, for pre-military pilot training
- the Flying School at Tuskegee Army Air Field (activated July 1941) for military pre-flight, basic and advance pilot training.

Blacks could now volunteer for segregated pilot training in a flying Aviation Squadron of the Black Air Force established by the Executive Branch of government. This segregated pilot training was still unacceptable to black Judge William H. Hastie, Dean, Howard University Law School, and other black and white activists because it violated the provisions of the 1940 Amended Selective Training and Service Act disallowing discrimination based on "race and color." And to further frustrate assertive Yancey Williams, a CPTP graduate of its elementary and secondary flying courses, and as a commissioned reserve officer of the ROTC Program, he was ordered to active duty as an Infantry Officer. In 1944 he was transferred from the Army to the Black Air Force for pilot training at the Tuskegee Army Flying School. As a student officer he graduated as a single engine fighter pilot with the year's last class, 44-K, December 28, 1944. This was years after his application for the Air Corps and the War Department's January 1941 mandate establishing the Black Air Force. Yancey Williams lost his life on October 22, 1953 when the engine failed on the F86D aircraft he was flight testing. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

## THE FIVE PHASES OF THE EXPERIMENT

The 1939 provisions by Congress resulted in six segregated CPTP centers for blacks in the South. These six centers were established at black colleges, including Tuskegee Institute with Primary Flying Training under PL 18. With the addition of Tuskegee Army Air Field (TAAF) in 1941, Tuskegee evolved as the government's only center for blacks in civilian and Black Air Force pilot training. Tuskegee Institute became the center for civilian pilot training and TAAF the center for Black Air Force pilot training. Therefore, the term "The Tuskegee Experiment" includes all civilian and Black Air Force personnel in the five phases of the "Experiment" from 1939 to 1949 under the CPTP, PL 18 and at TAAF. Historically, these men and women are known as Tuskegee Airmen. In any event, they served in one or more of the civilian and Black Air Force five phases of "The Tuskegee Experiment" as follows:

1. Civilian Pilot Training Program 1939-1944;
2. Primary Flying Training (Civilian) 1941-1945;
3. Tuskegee Army Air Field (Black Air Force) 1941-1946;
4. Fighter Pilot Organizations (Black Air Force) 1941-1949;
5. Bomber Pilot Organizations (Black Air Force) 1944-1947.

## ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS OF THE FIVE PHASES

### 1. Civilian Pilot Training Program 1939-1944

This CAA sponsored program was to provide a reserve of civilian pilots for a war emergency. Beginning annually in the Fall of 1939, and continuing in the Spring and Summer, blacks could enter the CPTP at each of the following six black colleges:

Delaware State College, Dover, Delaware;  
Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia;  
Howard University, Washington, D.C.;  
North Carolina A&T College, Greensboro, North Carolina;  
Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama; and  
West Virginia State College, Institute, West Virginia.

Originally, only 35 students were to be chosen and given 30 weeks of flying training while attending college. Further, two non-college institutions for blacks in the Chicago area, the Coffey School of

Aeronautics at the Harlem Airport, Oak Lawn, Illinois, and the North Suburban Flying School at Glenview, Illinois, were selected to train black students in the CPTP. Additionally, other blacks were admitted into some non-black CPTPs in the Central, Eastern and Western Regions.

According to *The Putt-Putt Air Force*, 346 blacks in five of the six black colleges were certified under the CAA elementary flying course. Tuskegee Institute, the sixth college, estimated about 400 students successfully completed all of its CAA flying courses. Some known women students who became certified CAA pilots under the CPTP includes Mildred Curtis at Hampton Institute and Mildred Hansen and Mildred Hemmons at Tuskegee Institute along with Rose Rolls and Mary Parker at West Virginia State College. Their inspiration could have come from Bessie Coleman (1892-1926), who in 1921, became the first black in the World to be a licensed pilot.

All six colleges had the elementary training course flying Piper Cub airplanes with predominantly black flying and ground CPTP instructors. Significantly, only Tuskegee Institute, with all black Flight Instructors, had the secondary training course flying the greater horse powered Waco airplanes and other advance flying courses. Among these advance courses students could gain certification for flight instructor, cross country flying, instrument flying and as a civilian commercial flight officer. Consequently, for the secondary and advance flying courses, the other five CPTP black colleges sent their students to Tuskegee Institute. George L. Washington, a black professor and head of the Department of Mechanical Industries, Division of Aeronautics, Tuskegee Institute, was the director of the Institute's CPTP. Charles A. "Chief" Anderson, a pioneer black pilot, was the Chief Pilot in the CPTP at the Institute's Kennedy Field, Union Springs, Alabama. Technical ground training, such as airplane mechanics, was a part of all CPTPs. After Pearl Harbor the CPTP became the War Training Service. In the late Summer of 1944 this service was terminated due to the additionally expanded large-scale military pilot training brought on by the war.

## 2. Primary Flying Training (Civilian) 1941-1945

Originally in 1941 the nine week military pre-flight ground training and nine week civilian contract Primary Flying Training were at Tuskegee Institute. Then in 1942 when the aviation cadet housing area at TAAF was completed, military pre-flight training was transferred to TAAF

as intended. Every five weeks as each class of aviation cadets completed pre-flight at TAAF, they were transferred to Tuskegee Institute for nine weeks in primary for ground and pre-military flying training. The "washout" rate of CPTP, civilian and military aviation cadets, were highest in the primary flying level. The day a cadet was informed of his elimination from pilot training (washout) was euphemistically called "mayday" - the international oral distress call over the air waves. The 1941 cadets who suffered "mayday" were returned to civilian life. In the latter part of 1942 white "washed out" aviation cadets, who qualified, were retained in the Army Air Forces as an aviation cadet for training as a Navigator, Bombardier or both. The non-qualifying cadets were retained with enlisted grades of "buck" Private thru Technical Sergeant. This was based upon their prior civilian and aviation cadet qualifications. These opportunities were not available to the black "washed out" aviation cadets. Irrespective of their qualifications, they all became "buck" Privates in the Black Air Force at crowded TAAF.

On each flying day primary aviation cadets from the campus of Tuskegee Institute would be driven five miles for pilot training. A shuttle bus delivered them to the "ready room" on the flight line at Moton Field, location of the 66th Army (Primary) Flying Training Detachment. On the way to the "ready room" with a black bus driver, the cadets would be singing Air Corps, popular, jazz and black folk songs. The songs were to hide or to alleviate the fear of "mayday" for ground or flying deficiencies evaluated by their black instructors. Upon arrival at the "ready room" on the flight line the cadets would read their flying schedule. Also, they learned which of the bi-wing PT-17s they were assigned to fly with their black Flight Instructor. In addition, they could be scheduled for check flight certification by the white military Check Flight Instructor. If the check flight is successful the cadet is certified for military flying training at TAAF. This check flight test could generate the fear of suffering "washout." The military Detachment was administered by white officers. Flying operations were managed by black civilians. Tuskegee Institute's Professor George L. Washington was the General Manager of operations for primary flying and pioneer aviator Charles A. "Chief" Anderson was the Group Commander of the black civilian Flight Instructors. The break down of aviation cadets entering primary from pre-flight and being certified from civilian primary to the Black Air Force Basic Flying Training at TAAF were not in the sources reviewed by this writer.

### 3. Tuskegee Army Air Field (Black Air Force) 1941-1946

#### The Tuskegee Army Flying School

TAAF is the home base and heart of "The Tuskegee Experiment" because it was the location of the Tuskegee Army Flying School. Here aviation cadets were trained as single engine fighter or twin engine bomber pilots for the Black Air Force. Initially in Basic Flying Training the aviation cadets flew BT-13s. And in Advance Flying Training cadets for fighter planes flew AT-6s and cadets for bomber planes flew AT-10s. Aviation cadets graduated from the Tuskegee Army Flying School after being certified from the civilian primary and the Black Air Force basic and advance pilot training. Of the 926 graduates (including Student Officers) from 1942 to 1946, there were 673 single engine fighter pilots and 253 twin engine bomber pilots. The TAAF Commander, Director of the Tuskegee Army Flying School, all Flight Instructors and key TAAF positions in the early years were staffed by white officers.

#### Aviation Cadets: Eleven Classes A Year (A-K), One Every 5 Weeks

From aviation cadet to a certified military pilot took 36 weeks of training. For the white Army Air Forces the four training levels (pre-flight, primary, basic and advance) were at four separate all white facilities devoted exclusively to a specific training level. These separate facilities were maintained like "country clubs." In addition, separate advance flying facilities were maintained for these future white fighter or bomber pilot officers and gentlemen in the Army of the United States. And the communities in which their training was located welcomed the white aviation cadets with open arms, legs and doors. For the Black Air Force aviation cadets they had to receive their four levels of fighter or bomber pilot training at the two facilities in Tuskegee. This segregated training approach made TAAF very overcrowded. Moreover, in the blacks' situation neither arms, legs nor doors of the community were opened to these future black pilot officers and gentlemen in the Army of the United States. Overcrowded TAAF housed the pre-flight, basic and advance levels while the primary level was conducted at Tuskegee Institute. Additionally, TAAF trained black U.S. Army officers as liaison pilots and black Haitian officers as pilots. Notwithstanding these segregated facilities were inherently unequal, the military made sure that as for planes, supplies, maintenance parts, equipment, etc., TAAF may have faired better than some white facilities.

In the first level, pre-flight, civilian and military trainees were to be transformed, both mentally and physically, into aviation cadets in 9 weeks. At the white facilities this was done by white Tactical Officers. At TAAF the "Tactical Officers" for the pre-flight cadets were the black upperclassmen in basic and advance pilot training. In effect Tuskegee Army Flying School, with three levels of training to become a Black Air Force pilot, was the equivalent of a "Pilot Academy" for the Black Air Force. Civilian Primary Flying training was to determine if the cadet had the potential to advance to basic military pilot training. If a cadet soloed within the prescribed 20 hours of primary flying he was deemed qualified for military training. Thereafter, he could be "washed out" for deficiency in either ground or flying training during the primary, basic or advance levels. Additionally, a cadet could be "washed out" for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman on or off base. The *Putt-Putt Air Force*, a publication of the Federal Aviation Administration, U. S. Department of Transportation, mentions there were 2411 black flying students in the primary level with no number as to "washouts" or moving on to Basic Flying Training at TAAF. With 1485 of these flying students not graduating from TAAF, the overall "washout" rate would be 62 percent.

#### Administration of TAAF

In December 1942, Colonel Noel F. Parrish became the third white and last Commander of TAAF and remained in that position until 1946. To his integrity, Colonel Parrish, a racially enlightened Kentuckian familiar with Gunnar Myrdal's *The American Dilemma*, a study of race problems in America, believed in the abilities of the blacks. Colonel Parrish was the only white member of TAAF's Officers' Club. He and all other white officers lived off base. Under Colonel Parrish, four of the black Flight Instructors in Primary Flying Training at Moton Field, as well as returning black combat experienced pilots became basic and advance Flight Instructors at TAAF. Further, other flying and non-flying black officers held key TAAF ground and administrative positions until TAAF closed in 1946. In addition to the Aviation Cadet Flying and Ground School there were black and white Commanding Officers commanding black personnel in the base, service and support units as follows: airplane maintenance (3), air base, chemical warfare, marching band, medical detachment (black nurses, 1 dentist was white), military guard, motor transportation, ordnance, quartermaster (2, motor, supply), station hospital (white post surgeon), signal aircraft warning and weather detachment.

### Non-Flying Training

All non-flying personnel for ground, technical and administrative skills required to operate an Army Air Forces Field were trained at either Army, Army Air Forces or civilian installations located throughout the United States. Classes were conducted by white instructors in both racially segregated and integrated civilian and military facilities. The few black instructors at these locations were removed because letters to Members of Congress indicated that Southern white people would not support the war effort with black instructors crammed down their throats.

Training in both types of settings was conducted with few racial conflicts between students and their instructors. Sleeping facilities for the black students in bachelor officer quarters and enlisted barracks were usually segregated. Upon graduation from these civilian and military training facilities, blacks were transferred back to their prior assignments or to TAAF. Due to the ill planning by the Army Air Forces, many of these graduates did not become the cadres for the newly activated single and twin engine squadrons and groups at Selfridge and Godman Fields where Black Air Force personnel were stationed. Instead, many were underutilized at overcrowded TAAF with its excessive mechanical, technical, administrative and flying personnel.

### Before Pearl Harbor

The first black aviation cadets (June 1941) were in training at the new red brick live-in Army Air Forces Technical School for white aviation cadets and enlisted men at Chanute Field, Rantoul, Illinois. In contrast, the black aviation cadets and black enlisted men were housed over a mile away on the far side of the field in WW I tar paper covered barracks with zinc troughs. For airplane maintenance these black cadets were trained with the white aviation cadets. The other black cadets for armament or communications were trained in the red brick live-in school along with the black enlisted men. These five cadets graduated in November 1941, and following their hands-on experience they were commissioned Second Lieutenants in the Army of the United States for airplane maintenance, armament and communications. All were assigned to TAAF and went overseas with our fighter organizations.

The first technical cadres for the 99th Pursuit Squadron and TAAF were approximately 290 black Regular Army Air Corps enlistees who graduated October 1941 from the Technical School at Chanute Field as airplane mechanics, armorers, meteorologists, parachute riggers, radio operators, etc. As a result of the announcement in January for the formation of the 99th Pursuit Squadron, these blacks were the first to enlist in the Army Air Corps in the Spring of 1941. At about the same time approximately 100 black draftees, primarily from the South, were assigned or transferred from Aviation Squadrons to the 99th for Aviation Squadron duties while the black cadets and Regular Army Air Corps enlistees attended classes in the new red brick live-in technical school. The enlistees came from the nine Army Corps areas covering the United States and the Virgin Islands. Many journeyed from black and white colleges as students and as graduates to be a part of military aviation in "The Tuskegee Experiment." And they became a backbone for fighting stateside racism, particularly at TAAF.

With very high grades in all areas, these Regular Army enlistees were ready to demonstrate their newly acquired technical skills. On temporary duty enroute to TAAF, because of unfinished barracks there, the 99th Pursuit Squadron's first assignment in November was as an "Aviation Squadron" at Maxwell Field, Montgomery, Alabama, with Maxwell's Aviation Squadron. And on November 11, 1941, the newly arrived 99th was the attraction in the Montgomery Armistice Day parade. In spite of the technical skills of the 99th, they were assigned "servant" duties of "labor and odd job chores." Maxwell Field was a military Basic Flying Training School with BT-13s. Under the Lend Lease Act, British, Canadian and French aviation cadets were trained at Maxwell along with the American aviation cadets. Due to a peace time shortage of white airplane mechanics many BT-13s sat idle. Without regard for the Air Corps critical shortage of qualified airplane mechanics, the planes were allowed to sit idle, rather than to have the over 150 qualified black airplane mechanics from the 99th Pursuit Squadron service them. Clearly, the racist attitude against the use of blacks in flying squadrons persisted. The 99th Pursuit Squadron continued its various non-orderly "servant" jobs and chores as an "Aviation Squadron." These airmen were housed in "tent city" until after Pearl Harbor when they were transferred to TAAF in mid-December 1941 to its "tent city." Here they serviced the planes of the Black Air Force for flying and combat training.

#### 4. Fighter Pilot Organizations (Black Air Force) 1941-1949

##### Forming The Combat Squadrons

Advance single engine flying training cadets graduated as fighter pilots of TAAF every five weeks from its first class, 42-C in 1942, to its last class, 46-C in 1946. These 673 graduates, finally in officer uniforms, received their Black Air Force silver pilot wings and gold Second Lieutenant or Flight Officer bars. At long last, each of these proud and highly qualified black aviation cadets became a rated pilot, a commissioned officer and a gentleman in the Army of the United States. During the first two years of graduating classes, 42-C thru 44-C, many of the CPTP pilots "washed out." Unofficially, it was believed a quota existed where blacks could not have a lower "washout" rate than white aviation cadets. This high rate of black "washouts" was irrespective of their previous CPTP or other flying experience. The 35 graduates from the first five classes, 42-C thru 42-G, became the first black pilots assigned to the 99th Pursuit Squadron, which recently (May 1942) had been redesignated a Fighter Squadron.

In April 1943, 28 of these 35 fighter pilots sailed from Brooklyn, New York, to go into combat overseas with the 99th Fighter Squadron and its service and supply units. The remaining 7 pilots and subsequent single engine fighter pilots were assigned to one of three Squadrons (100th, 301st, 302nd) of the 332nd Fighter Group (activated October 4, 1942) at TAAF. They were stationed at Selfridge Field, Mt. Clements, with a gunnery subbase at Oscoda, also in Michigan. Here they were to receive overseas combat training with its 553rd Replacement Training Unit. While under the command of white supervisory personnel, the black officers were denied the use of the Officer's Club by the Base Commander, the Commanding General of the First Air Force, Mitchell Field, New York and the Chief of the Army Air Forces, General (no mixing of the races) Arnold.

The 332nd had its service and support units when going overseas under the command of Lt Colonel Davis with some black combat pilots from the 99th. They sailed from Norfolk, Virginia in January 1944. With the addition of the 99th in May 1944 the 332nd became the Air Forces' only four squadron Fighter Group. This exacerbated the situation with regard to leadership positions already undergraded by one or two grades. While overseas they flew P-40's, P-39's, P-47's and P-51's. The replacement rate of four pilots a month for these overseas black

pilots was not fulfilled. This failure caused the black combat pilots to involuntarily fly in excess of 50 missions before returning stateside. Thereby, further compounding the serious morale problem which adversely affected their overseas tours, promotions, etc. These stagnating conditions were caused solely by the inadequate and reluctant planning of General Arnold and his staff with their racist attitudes.

### Evaluation in Combat

Unlike the white Army Air Forces, the Black Air Force aviation cadets, stateside and overseas pilots, did not have black experienced, seasoned, or combat pilots as role models or as trainers in the initial years. The equally trained, proficient but inexperienced black pilots were neither encouraged nor wanted in the white Army Air Forces. Commanders of overseas and stateside theaters of operations denied black pilots opportunities for combat or non-combat pilot assignments. The adverse conditions under which the black pilots were trained in the "Experiment" were intentionally ignored and used against them in combat. In the Summer of 1943 the 99th flew P-40s along with the all white 33rd Fighter Group in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. The Group Commander's assessment of the 99th's performance was based on his observations which he did not discuss with the Squadron Commander, Colonel Davis. The unfavorable report on their air discipline was endorsed up the chain of command by senior Army Air Forces Commanders who added comments and statistics comparing the 99th to P-40 and non P-40 fighter squadrons' combat record. This comparative report was skewed and reminiscent of the 1925 Army War College study. These biased Commanders intentionally fulfilled the white racist prophesy that blacks were "unfit for combat." As a consequence, the Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, "Hap" Arnold, now a four star General, gladly recommended to four star General Marshall, Chief of Staff in the War Department, as follows:

- the 99th Fighter Squadron be removed from tactical operations
- the 332nd Fighter Group, when ready for deployment be sent to a non-combat area
- the plan to activate the 477th Bombardment Group (Medium) be abandoned.

In other words get rid of the black pilots in combat and keep them "in their place" by serving exclusively in non-combat units. Again, General Arnold boldly attempted to justify his racist desire to keep blacks from flying in "his" white Army Air Forces.

### Rebuttal to the Evaluation

In September 1943, Colonel Davis was suddenly called back to the States to take command of the 332nd Fighter Group. On his way the Pentagon ordered him to appear before the War Department Committee on Special Troops Policies (McCloy Committee) for blacks. His presence was required to express his views on the report. Colonel Davis, with restrained rage for the report being issued behind his back, adroitly pointed out the flaws in the evaluation of the 99th. He indicated that the unique elements of each battle were overlooked by senior Commanders in order to claim the 99th, flying P-40s, fell below the standards of white fighter squadrons. Colonel Davis knew that when compared with P-40 squadrons in the same Theater of Operations, the record of the 99th overseas flying P-40s was as good as, if not better than, the record of other P-40 squadrons.

Subsequently, according to General Davis' reference to this report in his *Autobiography, Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. - American*, Chief of Staff General Marshall had the Army Division of Operations (G-3) conduct an eight month study between July 1943 and February 1944. The G-3 report supported Colonel Davis' estimate of the 99th and began by stating: "An examination of the record of the 99th reveals no significant general difference between this squadron and the balance of the P-40 squadrons in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations" (Davis, 1991,107). Further, the report recommended the senior Commanders, who endorsed the hostile and racist evaluation of the 99th, to study the attached statistics. General Arnold, with tongue in cheek, had to accept this evaluation. Here again surfaces the unsuccessful racist efforts of the Army Air Forces to denigrate the contributions of black pilots to the war efforts.

### The Black Pilots Continued Their Combat Mission

Given the continued protest of the black press along with interracial civilian and military support, the 99th remained in their combat missions. And given racial discrimination and segregation, command of the 99th Fighter Squadron in September 1943 was left to its

undergraded Operations Officer, Captain George S. "Spanky" Roberts of the first class, 42-C. These black pilots of the 99th were keenly aware of their abilities to fly. They continued their growing experience with the 332nd Fighter Group from May 1944 to perform admirably as the official record shows. Among their awards are unit citations for the pilots and their service and support units. Of 450 overseas pilots about 150 received the Distinguished Flying Cross. The earning of these and other symbols of outstanding combat accomplishments indicates the Army Air Forces' chain of command's hostile criticism was premature and clearly unwarranted.

The 332nd was deactivated in October 1945. As the "Red Tails" and its units of the 332nd sailed for home all across the United States (with very recently promoted Lt. Colonel "Spanky" Roberts as the Group Commander and still undergraded) they wondered with the white airmen aboard as to what racial changes would take place. Low and behold as they came down the gang plank docked in Staten Island, New York City, they found their answer. It was two black on white signs which indicated the separate directions the black and white airmen were to follow to be processed for reassignment or separation from the service. The 99th, at Lockbourne Air Base, Ohio, was deactivated in July 1949.

## 5 Bomber Pilot Organizations (Black Air Force) 1944-1947

### Twin Engine Flight Crews and Ground Training

Beginning with class 43-J to the last class, 46-C, a total of 253 aviation cadets graduated as twin engine bomber pilots from Advance Pilot Training at the Tuskegee Army Flying School along with their single engine fighter pilot classmates. Upon graduation these bomber pilots also received their Black Air Force silver pilot wings, gold Second Lieutenant or Flight Officer bars and commission as an officer and a gentleman in the Army of the United States. All the twin engine graduates were assigned to the 477th Bombardment (Medium) Group (activated January 15, 1944) to become a pilot or co-pilot of a flight crew in one of the four B-25 squadrons. These assignments were either in the 616th/617th at Godman Field, Fort Knox, Kentucky, or the 618th/619th at Atterbury Field, Columbus, Indiana. When the Squadrons' complement of pilots were fulfilled the remainder of the graduates were assigned to the Officer Training Unit (118th Army Air Forces Base Unit) at Godman.

Under the General Mobilization Plan of the 1930s civilian facilities were contracted to train employees and students in needed technical skills for the war effort. In time blacks were included in some of these segregated and non-segregated facilities. Therefore, by the time the 477th was activated in 1944 these technically trained blacks, now as draftees, finally ended-up at TAAF from Army and Army Air Forces installations.

In the meantime before 1944 the Army Air Forces began sending black personnel for military technical training to fill the contemplated positions for the non-pilot medium bomber flight crews. These flying crew members of officers (navigators, bombardiers) and non-officers (engineers, radio operators, flexible gunners) as well as the technical ground service personnel and specialists (engineering officers, crew chiefs, airplane mechanics, armorers, electricians, etc.) received training in both segregated and non-segregated centers. This training was conducted at various civilian, Army and Army Air Forces Training, Technical, and Ground Schools throughout the United States. As was the case with the non-pilot single engine technical and ground training, classes were conducted by white instructors with few racial conflicts between students and their instructors. Upon graduation, black graduates were assigned to the 477th.

#### Racial Tension in the 477th

Unlike the all black 99th and 332nd, the 477th, commanded by whites, was plagued with racial tension and incidents of disharmony and distrust. This was created by its all white command under the First Air Force, Mitchell Field, New York, during 1944-45. These white non-combat experienced pilots and ground officers occupied all of the non-medical key Squadrons', Group's and Air Field's flying and ground staff positions for Captain and above. Effectively, this adverse racial situation denied the black pilots and black ground officers their deserved promotions. On a revolving door basis the non-combat trained white pilots and white ground officers filled the table of organization positions with assignments and promotions over the deserving blacks. In addition, many of the white pilots had less flying hours in the B-25 than the black pilots being trained under them. Obviously, this was an untenable and troublesome situation for all the highly competent and qualified black personnel of the 477th. As a consequence of this adverse racial condition and growing tension, which lasted for a year and a half (January 1944 - June 1945), the 477th never became combat ready with its full complement of flight crews before the end of World War II.

## "Battle" at Freeman Field in the American Theater of Operations

Segregated conditions and racial tensions at Godman and Atterbury Fields along with the need to train the four squadrons on one field, resulted in the 477th movement to Freeman Field during March 1945. Its Replacement Training Unit (RTU) followed on April 5th. Here the racial tensions came to a head in the Spring of 1945 and marked the turning point to end the all white command of the 477th. From April 5-20 a "Battle" ensued over the use of the Officers' Club, for whites only. On two consecutive evenings at Freeman Field, Seymour, Indiana, with the knowledge and assertive support of the non-officer airmen, approximately 61 black officers endeavored to utilize the Club as customary for officers. On the third day, April 7th, the club was closed. The 61 officers had been placed under arrest in quarters for entering or attempting to enter the Club. They were released by April 9th. Three of the officers accused of pushing aside a white officer to enter the Club were not released. In July 1945 these three accused officers were court martialed before black officers at Godman Field. Two of the officers were acquitted and one was fined \$50 a month for three months.

For the next five days (April 8-12), the First Air Force Command, under the direction of General Arnold, developed strategies to preclude the black officers from using the Officers' Club. As their strategies failed to persuade all black officers to sign and comply with the April 11, 1941 "Jim Crow" Base Regulation 85-2 (to use facilities only as designated, by race, i.e., Administration - white, "Trainees" - black), logistical preparations had been initiated to incarcerate the asserting officers. As a final strategy, a Board of Officers "ordered" and had the white Commanding Officers (COs) order the non-complying black officers, individually, to sign the "Jim Crow" Base Regulation. In spite of the Board's and their "CO's" orders, 101 "stubborn" black officers refused, individually, to sign the "Jim Crow" Base Regulation. As a consequence, the 101, excluding the three held for court martial, were ordered arrest in quarters. Obviously, the officers' resolve was to stand firm in the face of a possible charge of mutiny, punishable by death.

### Incarceration

On April 13th, as a consequence of their assertion, the 101 "Stubborn" Black Air Force Officers were flown back to Godman in six cargo C-46s under arrest in transit. Upon arrival they were placed back under

arrest in quarters at two of their old bachelor officer quarters on either side of the Officers Mess. These three buildings were made ready and surrounded by a 9' wire fence in "three days" (April 10-12). This logistical feat was to keep blacks "in their place." With flood lights shining on the buildings from each cardinal corner, armed white Military Police guards surrounded the compound outside the fence 24 hours a day - "Gestapo" style - to prevent a possible escape by the black officers and gentlemen in the Army of the United States.

These confined assertive black officers, unknown to them initially, were being held to be investigated by the Air Inspector General. They were to be charged with mutiny and willfully disobeying a superior officer. The former charge, mutiny, would be for refusing, "collectively," to sign the "Jim Crow" Base Regulation, and the latter charge for willfully disobeying the direct order of their immediate white "CO." Across the road in Fort Knox, these 101 "stubborn" black officers could observe the unguarded Italian POWs (with a white "P" stenciled on the back of their blue denim work uniform) dispensing rationed gas at the Fort Knox Post Exchange Gas Station to military personnel. Here in the eye sight of the 101 blacks, incarcerated for asserting their rights as officers and gentlemen in the Army of the United States, were POWs enjoying more privileges and freedom than these Americans of African descent.

#### Release, Reprimand and Response

For legal insufficiency and political reasons the "stubborn" 101 officers were released from confinement on April 20th, seven days after their incarceration without a charge. Under the direction of General Arnold, the Freeman Field Commander sent a one paragraph administrative reprimand, April 24th, to each of the 101 black officers stating: "On or about April 11, 1945, at Freeman Field, Seymour, Indiana, you displayed a stubborn and uncooperative attitude towards reasonable efforts of constituted authority." The reprimand was to adversely affect the careers of the 101. It did in some cases with regard to promotions. Each of the 101 was still resolved to assert his rights for equal treatment as an officer and a gentleman of the United States. The 101 "stubborn" officers responded to the reprimand in consort with an identically worded rebuttal. Among their assertions was the claim that Freeman Field's racist Commander's "Jim Crow" Base Regulation 85-2, was in direct violation of Army Regulation 210-10, paragraph 19,

giving all officers the right to use the officers' club. As a consequence of the officers' club "Battle" at Freeman Field, the four squadron 477th, its base, service and supply units, with about 2500 black airmen, were crammed back into Godman Field. In many instances this move split black families of both enlisted and officer personnel housed on Freeman Field. Before the transfer of the 477th back to Godman Field the 101 had been transferred from Godman to Walterboro Field, South Carolina, to the 126th Army Air Forces Base Unit.

### Change of Command

This successful "Battle" caused a change in the command of the 477th from all white to all black. Colonel Davis and his selected staff from the 332nd and 477th in 1945 accepted command of the 477th in June and Godman Field in July. Historically, this was a first in both instances of acceptance - a black Commander of a combat bomber group and of a stateside Army Air Forces Field. And still undergraded, Major "Spanky" Roberts was now left in command of the 332nd Fighter Group, the Air Forces only four squadron fighter group. The Tuskegee Airmen stationed at Godman Field were the largest number of blacks ever to be commanded by a black. The "Battle," with the 101 "stubborn" black officers, was a major political factor too in President Truman's consideration to issue his 1948 Executive Order 9981 mandating "equal opportunity and treatment" in the Armed Services.

Under Colonel Davis the 477th became the Army Air Forces' only Composite Group. Already the government had plans to reduce the Black Air Force. The Group included the 99th Fighter Squadron flying P-47Ds and the consolidated 617th (616/617) and 618th (618/619) Bombardment Squadrons flying B-25Js. Five star General Marshall and MacArthur approved the October 1945 deployment of the 477th to the Pacific Theater of Operations. Neither five star General Arnold, Commander of the Army Air Forces, nor four star General George C. Kenny, Commander, Army Air Forces in the Pacific, were in accord with General Marshall's and MacArthur's decision to send the 477th to the Pacific. General Arnold's persistent and relentless racist determination to not have black combat pilots flying in "his" white Army Air Forces was still well alive. General MacArthur felt he could use all the help he could get. With atomic bombs dropped on Japan by the Americans, V-J Day came in August 1945 before the 477th could be deployed to the Pacific.

## DEMOBILIZATION AND ABSORPTION

### Demobilization

The May 1945 cessation of hostilities in the European Theater of Operations, V-E Day, required redeployment of troops, service and support units to the Pacific Theater of Operations. At the same time, demobilization plans for some of the European personnel began. The sudden end of World War II by the atomic bombs accelerated and exacerbated the General Demobilization Plan. In any event, "The Tuskegee Experiment" was not an integral part of either the mobilization or demobilization plans of the Army Air Forces. This was so even after the 101 had returned to Godman from Walterboro, South Carolina, in October 1945. Certainly, the post war armed services was expected to be bigger, stronger and more efficient than it was before World War II. Therefore, the question regarding the post war role and status of the Black Air Force had to be considered.

### Relocation to a Permanent Base

In the fall of 1945, all volunteers at Godman Field who wanted to be part of the massive return to civilian life were accommodated by early 1946. As a result, the overcrowding at Godman lessened. During this time it leaked out that the 477th was to remain at Godman until a permanent air base could be found. Nationally, all local communities were still against any blacks in their back yard. Consequently, as a result of Executive fiat, the Black Air Force was headquartered at Lockbourne Air Base, eight miles South of Columbus, Ohio, the State capital. Movement to segregated Lockbourne took place in March 1946. Shortly thereafter, TAAF was closed and its remaining personnel, including the Woman's Army Corps, were transferred to Lockbourne. For the first time the Black Air Force of the "Experiment" would be consolidated at one base. This made Lockbourne Air Base a show case because of the skepticism and curiosity to see the successful Black Air Force. Segregated life as Tuskegee Airmen at Lockbourne was nearly equal to life on a white base. The base offered the basic amenities generally available on a World War II training facility becoming a permanent base. Among other things, this included a commissary which provides food for military families at a low cost; housing facilities for enlisted and officer personnel at a low cost; and a Post Exchange for consumer items at a low cost. Additionally, in accordance with Army Regulation 210-10, the Officers' Club was open to all officers assigned or visiting the base. During Wednesday night Bingo, 1946-1947,

"Chappie" and this writer, a 43-G "wash out," conducted the event as a "Mutt and Jeff" team with input from the Officers' Wives Club. As its President, Mrs. Davis was succeeded by the wife of this writer. For conviviality and other purposes the Club became a social center for some black citizens of Columbus.

Ironically, "Jim Crow" Freeman Field offered similar adequate amenities for the blacks. Yet, due to the racist mind-set of General Arnold and his staff, blacks were denied the opportunity to use and enjoy these benefits. This was due solely because black officers legally entered the Officers' Club which was illegally designated for white officers only. Obviously, the Army Air Forces racist attitude towards the war efforts precluded full combat training and cohesiveness of the four squadrons of the 477th Bombardment Group at one field. As a further consequence of General Arnold's racism the officers and non-officers of the 477th never became combat ready, and disintegrated. Thereby, development of the necessary organizational esprit de corps, for combat or non-combat missions, was denied the 477th. Whether the 477th could have been resurrected for the October 1945 deployment to the Pacific under Colonel Davis will never be known.

In July 1947, the Army Air Forces became the Air Force with its own Secretary of the Air Force in the newly established Department of Defense. The 477th Composite Group, with the now consolidated 617th (617th/618th) Squadron, was deactivated. Then the 332nd Fighter Group, with the 100th and 301st Fighter Squadrons, was reactivated and joined by the 99th. Now the 332nd was configured with the same three squadrons it had at the end of World War II. The ensuing reduction in force was to meet the standards and requirements for retention in the Air Force. This continuing post war cannibalization of the Black Air Force of over 5000, on four Air Fields (Tuskegee, Walterboro, Godman, Atterbury) and overseas, further reduced its personnel to less than 1000 Tuskegee Airmen on one field, Lockbourne. Subsequently, the 332nd Fighter Group was redesignated the 332nd Fighter Wing adhering to the Air Force's new concept of streamlining administrative management.

### Air Force Plans for Integration Successfully Resisted

Before, during and after transition from the Army Air Forces to the Air Force, personnel studies were initiated to determine the most efficient use of blacks. All indications pointed to integration without specifically saying so. But, General Arnold's racist legacy still raised

its ugly head with resistance from Major General Dean C. Strother, Chief of Air Force Military Personnel and General George C. Kenny, Commander, Air University. According to Alan L. Gropman, in the Summer 1993 issue of *Air Power History*, General Strother "was unimpressed with the wartime experiences of the 332nd, although he believed General Davis to be competent, even superior. He remained opposed to integration." In the same article, Gropman states that General Kenny, who did not want the 477th in the Pacific under his command, "was so opposed to integration that he flew to Washington to try to convince Zucker that 'integration, the living integration, barracks integration, dining hall integration was not good for Negroes.'" (Gropman, 1993, 28). Zucker in 1948 was the Assistant Secretary of Defense, the number two man in the Department of Defense charged with the task of implementing integration.

### Absorption

More importantly, General Arnold's racist legacy was so entrenched that two Secretaries of Defense, the Secretary of the Air Force, the Assistant Secretary and two Air Force Chiefs of Staff dared not push senior Commanders to accept integration. The stalemate was alleviated by the political wisdom of President Harry S. Truman who was up for reelection with the need for black votes. In 1948 he promulgated Executive Order 9981 for "equal opportunity and treatment" in the Armed Services. That impetus caused the Air Force to *absorb* the Black Air Force in 1949 and send under 1000 Tuskegee Airmen all over the United States and World - "token integration." As a consequence, "The Tuskegee Experiment" came to its unspecified end. And without the blessing of racist General Arnold, by the end of 1951 the last black Aviation Squadron in "his" white Air Force was dissolved.

### SELECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

The number of accomplishments of the Tuskegee Airmen are more than half as many as the individuals in the "Experiment." No one knows, or can know, all of the Tuskegee Airmen accomplishments which contributed to the war effort and, in a larger sense, to the betterment of America. Therefore, some of this writer's narrative for the selected accomplishments below are well known. For the others, some might not have been thought of as accomplishments. In any event, the accomplishments in each of the five phases are linked to the overall success of "The Tuskegee Experiment."

### Civilian Pilot Training Program 1939-1944

This successful civilian program was the first to "show" America, "not prove" to America, blacks could fly. In six black colleges under CAA regulations blacks learned to fly from black and some white Flight Instructors. Over 500 CPTP trainees were certified as civilian pilots. Many of these pilots went on to become Black Air Force pilots and served overseas. Had the dedicated Flight Instructors not been successful in teaching the black trainee, more than likely the "Experiment" would not have "flown" off the ground, literally. Therefore, military flying for blacks would not have materialized. It is not an exaggeration to say half or more than half of the Black Air Force pilots who graduated in the 1942 classes, 42-C thru 42-K, were CPTP pilots trained by black Flight Instructors. The flying abilities of these successful black pilots made it more difficult for skeptics to question the ability of blacks to fly. Additionally, their abilities helped pave the way for post war opportunities in commercial aviation.

### Primary Flying Training (Civilian) 1941-1945

Several of the black CPTP Flight Instructors were advanced to Primary Flying Training Instructor at Moton Field, Tuskegee Institute. The objective here was to determine the potential of an aviation cadet to be a military pilot. In some cases the same CPTP trainee and Flight Instructor relationship carried over to this program. Under the Air Corps' flying standards, contract Primary Flying Training for military pilots had the highest "washout" rate in comparison to the military basic and advance training. As cadets went up the training levels the "washout" rates decreased. This brings to mind a statement to the effect that the "mayday" rate for blacks in comparison to whites at any flying level showed no significant differences. This probably is true or else we would have heard that black aviation cadets had a significantly higher "washout" rate. Clearly, the conscientious black civilian Flight Instructors must be given credit for providing sound fundamental flying skills for the black aviation cadets. As a result of the 2411 black aviation cadets and student officers who entered Primary Flying Training 926 or 38% graduated as Black Air Force pilots.

### Tuskegee Army Air Field (Black Air Force) 1941-1946

The third and last white Commander of TAAF, the late Colonel Noel F. Parrish (1909-1987) never hesitated at Tuskegee Airmen conventions and elsewhere to let it be known he was a proud Tuskegee Airman.

More than anyone, and at the heart of "The Tuskegee Experiment," Colonel Parrish made the "Experiment" succeed against all odds. This won for him the support and respect of the blacks. The "Experiment" succeeded because of his vision and belief in the abilities of blacks.

#### Fighter Pilot Organizations (Black Air Force) 1941-1949

Just before switching to P-51s, the 332nd "Red Tails" flying P-47s made their last major airborne achievement in June 1944 by sinking a German destroyer in Italy's Trieste Harbor. The Harbor is located where the borders of Italy and Yugoslavia meet on the Gulf of Trieste. This astonishing feat was accomplished using only their .50 caliber machine guns. The 15th Air Force senior Commanders were quite skeptical after receiving the reports, as the P-47s carried no bombs on this mission. The wing cameras on the P-47 "Thunderbolts" provided the stark evidence of the pilots' accuracy with their machine guns. These black pilots accomplished what no other fighter group could claim. This made the feat even more satisfying. What is even more important, these "Red Tails" never lost an American A-20, B-17, B-24, B-25, B-26 or an allied bomber to any enemy aircraft in over 200 escort missions. Again, a feat no white fighter group could claim because the black pilots of the "Red Tails," just would not leave their fellow white American skybourne airmen unescorted under any circumstance. On a racially segregated basis as Americans of African descent the "Red Tails" were serving *their* America too, which continues (1619-1993) to deny them and their progeny freedom, equality and justice. They and other blacks in WW II, died, were prisoners of war, missing in action, physically injured and psychologically scared. For What? They all, black and white American veterans, came back to remain racially segregated - physically and psychologically. What white Americans served America by dying in war for Americans of African descent? And under what circumstances would a white American want to be black?

#### Bomber Pilot Organizations (Black Air Force) 1944-1947

Clearly, the Freeman Field "Battle" over the assertion of officers' rights, illustrates the United States government's civilian and military inconsistency, hypocrisy, and Myrdal's "American Dilemma." It suggests awareness of the above futility by the "Red Tails" and all other black Americans overseas fighting wars for and by the white male Christians. This "Battle" was the rallying point by Black Americans to help win the war against white Christian racism in the

States while the 99th and the 332nd were rallying to help win still another war overseas between the white Christians. As a consequence, the Tuskegee Airmen won a "Double V" for their victory at home and abroad. This successful stateside April 1945 assertion of rights by personnel of the twin engine bomber organizations was an historical military continuity of the struggles and sacrifices by blacks for freedom, equality and justice for all Americans at home - but still not for Americans of African descent. Additionally, it was a stepping stone for the Civil Rights Movement which opened doors of opportunity for minorities and women.

### The Significance of the Tuskegee Airmen Accomplishments 1939-1949

The accomplishments in each of the five phases represent a part of the success of that phase. Taken together, they symbolize the success of "The Tuskegee Experiment." More importantly, the accomplishments of the Tuskegee Airmen continued the black sweat, blood and life given for and to white Christian Americans since 1619 to fulfill their dream of freedom to the detriment of Americans of African descent. In turn, since 1619, America's white male Christians have forcibly taken black sweat, blood and life for self-gratification. Their unethical and unlawful actions against blacks inured, and still inures, wealth to them and their progeny into "perpetuity." Conversely, the ensuing dehumanization of Americans of African descent inured, and still inures, to them and their progeny, political, economic and social deprivation into "perpetuity." Therefore, collectively for the past 374 years, in some instances with enlightened whites, blacks have organized covertly and overtly to protect their human and constitutional rights.

And keep in mind, historically in America, when race, race relations, etc. is raised, it refers only to the blacks and whites in the United States. All other non-black minorities here have been officially designated a non-black minority because of their ethnicity or a significant element of their ethnicity, e.g., religion, nationality, language, but not because of race. Further, as you read Table I, Canonical and Nazi Anti-Jewish Measures, on page 10 of The [Christian] Destruction of the European Jews, as mentioned on page 3 of this paper, substitute blacks for Jews. Then see if you too will say the millennium of Christian canonical persecution of the Jews was transferred in form and substance to the blacks by America's white male Christians. Over this 1000 year period it is inescapably clear, the Christians were saying to the Jews like some American Christians to blacks, even today: you have no right to live among us as

Jews/blacks; then, you have no right to live among us; and finally, you have no right to live. Consequently, the holocaust for the Jews and lynching for the blacks. Now, it is incarceration for our young alienated blacks created solely by and for the historical and continuing (1619-1993) predacity of America's white male Christians. This paper highlights the continuum of our collective black struggle to assert our human and civil rights "by any means necessary."

## EPILOGUE

As a Tuskegee Airman from the Spring of 1941 to the Spring of 1949, I was involved in four of the five phases. The organizations of which I was a part are as follows:

99th Pursuit Squadron;  
890th and 1155th Single Engine Flying Training Squadrons;  
66th Army Flying Training Detachment;  
First Class Each of Black Navigators, Bombardiers  
and Flexible Aerial Gunners;  
616th Bombardment Squadron/477th Bombardment Group;  
118th Army Air Forces Base Unit (RTU);  
126th Army Air forces Base Unit (RTU);  
617th Bombardment Squadron/477th Composite Group;  
332nd Fighter Group (reactivated); and the  
332nd Fighter Wing.

The various Army Air Fields at which I was stationed were: Chanute, Illinois; Maxwell, Tuskegee, and Moton, Alabama; back to Tuskegee; Hondo, Texas; Roswell, New Mexico; Yuma, Arizona; Godman, Kentucky; Freeman, Indiana; back to Godman; Walterboro, South Carolina; returned to Godman, then to Lockbourne, Ohio. During this period I served as an Airplane Mechanic (1941-1943), Navigator-Bombardier (1944-1947) and in non-flying service and support positions (1946-1949) at Lockbourne.

These segregated experiences, together with post war realizations, sharpened my assertiveness. It has made me aware of America's institutional racism and how a few racists like General Arnold inhibit the overwhelming number of ethical and lawful white Christian American males, and cause them to be a "silent majority." Silent, not only to the detriment of America and its principle of freedom, equality and justice for all, but much more importantly to themselves - with silence perpetuated through their families. If one of us as an American is not free - silenced - then none of us are free.

Finally, there is incisive American history we are intentionally not taught or exposed to in high school or elsewhere in America's public schooling. At least to lessen racism. This intent is to hide\* and deny the continuing adverse effects on black Americans as a consequence of the sin and evils of America's white Christian slavery (1619-1865). An historical example was on the occasion of the seventy-sixth

anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in Rochester, New York. It was the Fourth of July 1852 oration on the treatment and status of America's slaves by Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) the former slave fathered by a white Christian. After almost one hundred and fifty years later, the opening and closing remarks by Frederick Douglass are still applicable in 1993 in regard to America's political, economic and social treatment and status of its black citizens for 125 years (1868-1993) - the progeny of the slaves. That is, applicable to Americans of African descent, as well as to America.

The oration opens, "Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? And am I, therefore, called upon to bring our humble offering to the national altar and to confess the benefits and express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us?"

Would to God, both for your sakes and ours, that an affirmative answer could be truthfully returned to these questions! Then would my task be light, and any burden easy and delightful."

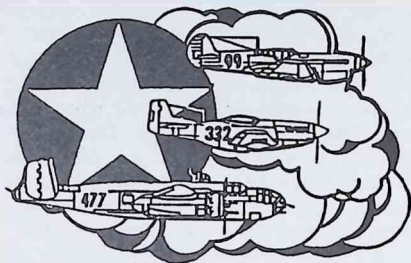
You can imagine the in between remarks from his closing. "What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty of which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity. Your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass-fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety and hypocrisy - a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States, at this hour.

Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival."

For white de facto Christian America to become the country it can and ought to be, the vestiges and current effects of past racial discrimination against our historical non-immigrant Americans of African descent have to be eliminated. This continuing holocaust to us was caused only by the predacity of America's white male immigrant Christians. All of whom came here as persons. They imported blacks as chattels, things, chained in slave cargo ships for work, sex and breeding, solely for Christian economic and commercial gain to the current benefit of all white America on stolen land. To now "do the right [ethical] thing" America's white Christians have to come to grips, as do the German Christians in regard to the holocaust, with itself for enslaving the blacks - physically (1619-1865) as slaves, and psychologically (1866 to \_\_\_\_\_) from chattels to persons (1866-1867) and as second class non-immigrant Christian citizens (1868 to \_\_\_\_\_). Thereby, for 374 uninterrupted years to date, America's white immigrant Christians have been living unconscionably and rapaciously off of the fruits and benefits gained unethically and unlawfully from the stolen land of the natives and the slave labor of the blacks.

\* Just as the Nazi white Christians in deliberate order in 1945 destroyed ovens to hide physical evidence of their "final solution" for the Jews, the American white Christians in deliberate order in 1947 destroyed TAAF, after it closed in 1946, to hide physical evidence of still keeping blacks "in their place."

## TUSKEGEE AIRMEN, INC.



In 1972, Tuskegee Airmen came together in Detroit, Michigan to establish a National Organization. Subsequently, in 1974 at Washington, D. C., Tuskegee Airmen Incorporated (TAI) was formed. Its purpose was to commemorate the experiences of Tuskegee Airmen. Additionally, the organization was formed to bring together in a spirit of friendship and goodwill all persons of the areas of the United States who shared in the aspirations, frustrations and successes of pioneering men and women in "The Tuskegee Experiment." TAI now has thirty-seven (37) chapters in the Eastern (11), Central (14) and Western (12) Regions with a rotating annual convention by region in the city of the host chapter.

A member of a chapter is now considered a Tuskegee Airman. Any person (male and female of all races) may join who is interested:

- in historical research and documentation of the Tuskegee Experiment
- in motivating young minority persons toward aviation and aerospace careers
- in inspiring our youth to outstanding achievement and leadership through social and educational activities
- in addressing matters of social concern and engage in activities in furtherance of objectives.

An application may be obtained from the nearest local TAI Chapter and submitted for membership.

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Note To The Reader

Since you are reading this please feel free to send any comments to P.O. Box 880452, San Francisco, CA 94188-0452 or call (415) 585-3686. This way my "Tuskegee Experiment" experience can be broadened and passed on orally or in writing. It is hoped this paper might be an incentive to Tuskegee Airmen to write about their experience in the "Experiment" in *any form*. Please send any writing to the Tuskegee Airmen National Museum (Historical Fort Wayne, Detroit), P. O. Box 32549, Detroit, MI 48232. Just as Tuskegee Airmen Davis, Francis and Phears in the bibliography made their contribution to our history I invite you to do likewise.

12-17-93

Civil Pilot Training Program	387th Hdqs & Service Squadron
Godman Field Station Hospital	477th Bombardment Group (M)
Lockbourne AB Station Hospital	477th Composit Group
Tuskegee Army Flying School	553rd Replacement Training Unit
Tuskegee AAF Station Hospital	590th Air Material Squadron
66th AAF Flying Training Detach't	602nd Air Engineering Squadron
83rd Fighter Control Squadron	616th Bombardment Squadron
96th Air Service Group	617th Bombardment Squadron
99th Pursuit Squadron	618th Bombardment Squadron
99th Fighter Squadron	619th Bombardment Squadron
100th Fighter Squadron	648th Ordnance Company
118th AAF Base Unit (RTU)	689th Signal Air Warning Squadron
126th AAF Base Unit (RTU)	717th Signal Aircraft Warning Co
301st Fighter Squadron	766th Army Air Forces Band
302nd Fighter Squadron	773rd Air Material Squadron
313th Army Air Forces Band	889th Single Engine Fly'g Train'g Sq
318th Base Hdqs & AB Svs Sq	890th Single Engine Fly'g Train'g Sq
332nd Air Base Group	941st Guard Squadron
332nd Airdrome Group	964th Quartermaster Platoon
332nd Fighter Group	1062nd Air Material Squadron
332nd Fighter Wing	1155th Single Engine Fly'g Train'g Sq
366th Air Service Squadron	1451st Quatermaster Company
367th Air Service Squadron	4413th Women Air Force Squadron
	Squadron "W" (WAF)

# TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

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AMERICA'S  
BLACK AIR FORCE  
IN WW II

the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) in 1967, and the *Journal of the American Psychiatric Association* (JAPA) in 1970.

These journals were the first to publish articles on the use of the term "borderline personality organization" (BPO) to describe a clinical entity. The term was used to describe a clinical entity that was distinct from the traditional categories of neurosis, psychosis, and personality disorder. The term was used to describe a clinical entity that was characterized by a "borderline" organization of the ego, which was characterized by a "borderline" organization of the ego, which was characterized by a "borderline" organization of the ego.

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# TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

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AMERICA'S  
BLACK AIR FORCE  
IN WW II

**Tuskegee experiment and Tuskegee airmen, 1939-1949**

**Le Roy F. Gillead**

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