



The Tuskegee Airmen - 332nd Fighter Group

Prior to World War II, the United States Army Air Corps did not have African Americans employed as pilots in their units. The policy and its justification can be found in a 1925 War Department report, which essentially states that African Americans did not have the intelligence to perform any military duties beyond those of a service capacity. This report ignored the evidence that was available from Civil War records, World War I records and, in particular, the actions of the 369 Infantry Regiment of the 93 Division during World War I where African American troops fought with French units. The saga of Private Henry Johnson as an example could easily dispel this report. In effect, the report stated that African Americans were cowards and did not have any viable leadership qualities. This claim can be easily disputed and disproved with a singular action from World War I in France. ...single handedly, Henry Johnson fought off twenty German Soldiers as they attacked his position while serving on guard duty. After shooting three German Soldiers, they continued to press the attack on him...reduced to hand-to-hand combat, Johnson retrieved his bolo knife from his waistband and continued the fight until the attacking Germans were put to flight. During his counter attack on the Germans before they had begun their flight, he rescued a fellow soldier from their control. By the end of Johnson's heroic action, he had received twenty wounds; which did not deter him from his aggressive posture. For his actions, he was awarded the Croix de Guerre, which is the highest award given by the French for bravery and devotion to duty. From his homeland, the United States, he received nothing. During the same war, the records detailing Eugene Bullard's efforts were available for the war department to review. Bullard was an African American pilot who flew with the French during the WWI, while serving in the French military and had received numerous awards for his bravery before he became a pilot. When the opportunity came for all of the volunteer pilots from United States to join the American Army Air force, Bullard was rejected and eventually pressure was applied to the French to dismiss him as a pilot.

The war Department, in its 1925 report, manufactured false information with regard to the intelligence and capabilities of African Americans...the proof to disclaim their report was within their reach to be found in military records and archives readily available to them for their review. Civil War records of African American Troops in combat told a different story than the one depicted in their report. For example, when the report stated that African Americans were cowards, twenty-five African Americans earned the Medal of Honor, which is the nation's highest military award during the American Civil War. The awardees included seven sailors of the Union Navy, fifteen soldiers of the United States Colored Troops, and soldiers of other army units. Fourteen of these medals were earned during intensive combat during the Civil War at the battle of Chiffon's Farm. Another four sailors earned their medals during the Battle of Mobile Bay. Eighteen African Americans earned the Medal of Honor during the Indian Wars of the Western United States; of these eighteen, fourteen were Buffalo soldiers, members of the United States first peacetime African American Regiments. The four Buffalo Soldier Regiments, the 9th Cavalry, 10th Cavalry, 24th Infantry, and 25th Infantry fought in campaigns throughout the western United States...four additional medals were given to Army Indian scouts recruited from among the African American Seminole Indians.



The record of Robert Smalls would have also added credible support to the claim by African Americans that they were as capable as white Americans to participate in the defense of their country. Robert Smalls was born a slave on April 5, 1839 and after the Civil War he became ship's captain, Sea Pilot and Politician. On May 13, 1862 he freed himself, his family and several of his slave neighbors by sailing out of the Charleston Harbor with a confederate Military Gun Ship. After the Civil War, he served in the South Carolina State Legislature and the United States House of Representatives. During his career, Smalls authored legislation that created South Carolina's first free and compulsory public school system in the United States. He founded the Republican Party in South Carolina and influenced President Abraham Lincoln to accept African American soldiers into the Union Army. He was the last Republican to represent South Carolina's Fifth Congressional District until 2010.

Armed with this knowledge and of such incidents as the Henry Johnson saga, Eugene Bullard and the 369 Regiment of the 93 Division, African Americans insisted that they should be given the opportunity to exercise their rights as citizens, join the military and fight for their country during World War II in all military branches including the Army Air force as pilots.

It was a long hard struggle before the Tuskegee Airmen pilot training became a reality. The Tuskegee Airmen had some help with their issue from the wife of the President. It is believed that she was responsible for helping to speed up the process of bringing the 99th Pursuit to fruition. On March 29, 1941, Mrs. Roosevelt visited Tuskegee and met the chief pilot of the Civilian Pilots Training Program and expressed her desire to fly with one of the pilots. Mrs. Roosevelt climbed in the back seat of a Piper Cub and flew around for a half hour with Charles "Chief" Anderson. After returning back to the field, Mrs. Roosevelt took a publicity photo with Anderson. Soon after her return to Washington, it was announced that the first African American Air Corps training would take place at Tuskegee. In the Spring of that same year, the first enlisted personnel began training to become maintenance technicians and the first thirteen pilot candidates entered training.

The shaping of the Tuskegee Airmen started with basic pilot training at Tuskegee Flying Field and the Civilian Pilots Training Program. Once pilots had passed their initial training at Tuskegee, they transported over to the Army Air Field to begin their training to become military pilots. The Civilian Pilot Training Program was established as a civilian program, but its potential for national defense was evident from its inception. The program started in early 1939, with the government paying for a 72-hour ground course followed by 35-to-65 hours of flight training. The flight training for African Americans was located at several African American Colleges. Tuskegee was one of these colleges with Civilian Pilot Training and eventually it was selected as the location to conduct all military pilot training for African Americans. This Program created pilots ready for military training and it became home of the 99th Pursuit Squadron and subsequently the Tuskegee Airmen.

On May 31, 1943 the 99th Fighter Squadron arrived in Tunisia with P-40 Aircraft and flew their first mission over the Island of Pantelleria. The mission consisted of the following pilots, Lt. William A. Campbell, Charles B. Hall, Clarence A. Jameson and James R. Wiley. On June 6, 1943 six pilots of the 99th



became the first African American pilots to engage in combat with German airplanes. Its next assignment was in Sicily, where it joined the 324 Fighter Group in El Haouria on June 29, 1943. After a few flights over Sicily, Lt. Charles B. Hall had shot down a FW-109 and two pilots were lost due to an operational accident. Despite their excellent performance, the 332nd received severe criticism from the Army Air Force leaders who wanted to scuttle the program, which had been labeled an "Experiment."

The 99th was assigned to provide support for a September invasion of Salerno on the Italian Peninsula and flew air cover over the Beachhead. In early October, the 99th started flying with the 79th and began to get some real combat flying to their credit. The 79th and 99th began to fly missions against railroad yards, bridges and communications installations to hamper the German's activities in the area. These missions were quite demanding and helped to prepare pilots of the 99th for the coming task ahead. On January 24, 1944, the 99th began to demonstrate its true capabilities by downing five German airplanes in a morning mission led by Lt. Jameson and three more. On that afternoon, when Lt Wiley entered combat with German airplanes, their luck had suddenly changed. On February 5, Lt. Driver got another one and on the 7th, three more airplanes were shot down. In April, the 99th was transferred to the 324 Fighter Group and on July 4, 1944 it was joined by three other Squadrons of Tuskegee produced pilots, which included the 100th, 301st and the 302nd to form the 332nd Fighter Group. At this point, the Tuskegee Airmen were on their own. The 332nd Fighter Group was equipped with P-51 Mustang Fighter planes, which they promptly painted the tails red; thereafter, becoming known as the "Red Tails." These airplanes were more of an even match for the German equipment that they had been flying against previously... from this point forward, the Tuskegee Airmen began to write their own aviation history. During this time period, the Allies had come to the conclusion that the War was coming to a close and began to strike within the heart of Germany with bombing raids consisting of large numbers of aircraft. At this point, they had begun to suffer unacceptable losses on bombing raids and sought to provide protection for the bombers on the way to their targets as well as on their return trip to their home bases. The Tuskegee Airmen were given the assignments of protecting these bombers and thus gained a reputation for their expert care of the bombers they were assigned to protect. Throughout July and October of 1944, the Red Tails were assigned missions of escorting bombers to their target areas and escorting them home on their return trips to their home bases. By this time period, the bomber pilots had developed a great deal of respect for the Red Tail pilots who were escorting them to their targets and back to their home bases. One B-24 pilot in Mustang Aces of the 8th and 15th Air Force made the following comment: "The P-38 groups always stayed too far out. Some of the Mustang groups stayed in too close...Other groups, we got the feeling that they just wanted to go shoot down 109s...The Red Tails were always out there where you wanted them to be...We had no idea they were Black: It was the Army's best kept Secret."

The Tuskegee Airmen flew until the War ended in Europe in May, 1945, and returned back to the United States. The combat record of the Tuskegee Airmen bears mute testimony to their capabilities as combat pilots and technicians who flew their airplanes and kept them flying under adverse circumstances and conditions that no other combat units of the American Air force were forced to



endure. There is no award for enduring the hurtful effects of racism and discrimination. If there were such awards, the Tuskegee Airmen would have been highly decorated. They were given used and worn out equipment to fly and had no replacements of mechanics or pilots, except those that were produced exclusively for the Tuskegee Airmen as a unit. No other Armed Forces group in World War II had similar restrictions; yet they surfaced from the War with an outstanding record despite these hardships.



Their combat record:

- ❖ Over 15,000 combat sorties flown.
- ❖ 111 German airplanes destroyed in the air and another 150 on the ground.
- ❖ 950 railcars, trucks, and other motor vehicles destroyed.
- ❖ One destroyer sunk by P-47 machine gun fire.
- ❖ Sixty-six pilots killed in action or accidents.
- ❖ Thirty-two pilots downed and captured, POWs.
- ❖ 150 Distinguished Flying crosses earned.
- ❖ 744 Air Medals
- ❖ 8 Purple Hearts
- ❖ 14 Bronze Stars



The following record summarizes the combat record of the 332nd Fighter Group. The Pilots are listed by their individual Squadron with their official credit for airplanes shot down.

99th Fighter Squadron

Edward L Toppins-4
Charles B. Hall-3
Leonard M. Jackson-3
Charles W. Allen-0.5
Willie Ashley, Jr.-1
Charles P. Bailey-1
Howard L. Baugh-1
Thomas P. Braswell-1
William A. Campnell-1
John W. Davis-1
William A. Campbell-1
John W. Davis-1
Lemuel L. Curtis-1
Robert. W. Dier-2
Elwood T. Driver-1
Wilson V. Eagle son Jr.-2
James L. Hall-1
Clinton B. Mills-1
Daniel L Rich-1

301st. Fighter Squadron

Joseph D. Elsberry-4
Carl E. Cory-2
John E. Edwards-2
James H. Fisher-4
Fredrick D. Funderburg—2
Alfred M. Gorham-2
Claude Govan-1
Thomas W. Jefferson-2
Jimmy Lanham-
Armour G. McDanials-1
Walter P. Manning-1
Harold M. Morris-1
William S. Price, III-1
Harold E. Sawyer-1
Harry T. Stewart-2
Charles L. White-2

100th Fighter Squadron

Raul W. Bell-1
Charles B. Brantley-1
John F. Briggs-1
Roscoe C. Browne-2
Richard W. Hall
Jack D. Hosclaw-2
Carl E. Johnson—1
Langdon F. Johnson-1
Earl R. Lane-2
Clarence D. Lester-2
John H. Lyle-1
Walter J.A. Palmer-1
George M. Rhodes-1
Robert W. Williams-2
Bertram W. Wilson, Jr. 1

302nd Fighter Squadron

Lee A. Archer-4
Wendell O. Pruitt-3
Roger Romaine-3
Milton P. Brooks-1
Charles W. Bussey-1
William W. Green-2
Weldon K. Groves-1
William L. Hill-1
Freddie M. Hutchins-1
Melvin T. Jackson-1
Felix J. Kirkpatrick-1
Charles E. McGee-1
Luther H. Smith Jr.-2
Robert H. Smith-2
William H. Thomas-1
Hugh S. Warner-1
Like J. Weathers Jr.-2
Laurence D. Wilkins-1