



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Delegate Magazine 1985

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[[Images]]

but those who made it through showed the real stuff they were made of in the flaming skies over North Africa, Sicily and Europe. Before training ended at Tuskegee, 992 men had earned their wings.

The 99th Fighter Squadron under the command of Col. Benjamin O. Davis Jr. (who was later to become the Air Force's first black Lt. General), was the first united to see combat. Later, the 99th was joined by three more Tuskegee trained squadrons - the 100th, the 301st, and the 302nd - and the unit was designated the 332nd Fighter Group.

By the end of the war in Europe, these gallant young men had flown 15,553 sorties and completed 1,578 missions. They had destroyed 111 enemy aircraft in the air and damaged another 25. On the ground they accounted for 150 planes destroyed and damaged another 123 damaged. Their skills were attested to by their reputation among bombing crews for providing effective protection on bombing runs over enemy territory, and by the way the Germans referred to them as "Schwartzes Vögelchen" - Black Birdmen.

Sixty-six of them died in combat and another 32 were captured as prisoners of war. They earned 150 distinguished Flying Crosses, Legions of Merit, Silver Stars, Purple Hearts, the Croix De Guerre, and the Red Star of Yugoslavia.

Back home, undoubtedly as a result of the success of the fighter pilots, other black pilots, navigators and crewmen had been trained medium bombardment duty. However, with the surrender of both German and Japan in 1945, this latter group never entered combat. Still they, the men who fought overseas, and the ten other civilian or military black men and women who were required to provide ground support for each black flyer, had demolished the theories of the doubting Thomases and the American military would never be the same.

The valor of these pioneers has been preserved through the founding of Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. Established in 1972 in Detroit as a non-political, non-military and non-profit national entity, it exists primarily to motivate and inspire young Americans to become participants in our nation's society and its democratic process.

Its general purposes and promotion of historical, scientific and social research, and the publishing and production of literary and educational projects. Its high national priority program is its National Scholarship Fund which in 1984 awarded 25 \$1200 grants to young men and women pursuing careers in aviation and/or aerospace.

Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. has 23 chapters located in major cities throughout the United States, Europe and Japan. Its membership is made up principally of armed forces veterans and active duty personnel representing all branches of the military. It also includes a growing number of civilians with a sincere interest in its goals and objectives.

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