

# TUSKEGEE AIRMEN OF WORLD WAR II

BOMBARDIERS - NAVIGATORS - MECHANICS



# APPROACHING WAR

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT EXPANDED THE ARMY EXPANSION ACT OF 1939

Some interpreted this act to begin training for black pilots

Black newspapers, the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* argued for blacks as pilots

Many military, particularly in South, thought blacks were inferior for military service

By 1940, Roosevelt announced training for these black pilots would be separate but equal

Time magazine called it, "As Jim Crow Flies"





## YANCY WILLIAMS

- \* Graduate of Booker T. Washington high school and Howard University
- \* Filed lawsuit to be accepted to flight school
- \* Lawsuit resulted in the Tuskegee Airmen flight-training school
- \* These aviators provided invaluable services to their country
- \* Tuskegee Airmen were awarded more than 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses



# Support Personnel

About 996 Tuskegee pilots flew in WWII.

Nearly 15,000 navigators, bombardiers, mechanics, nurses, instructors, and support personnel were under the umbrella name, Tuskegee Airmen.







## TUSKEGEE EXPERIMENT

Belief that blacks were inferior

Pilots were college educated

People believed that blacks could not fly sophisticated airplanes

The Tuskegee Airmen proved that this “experiment” was not a failure but one of the greatest successes of WWII





## ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Eleanor was a civil rights activist

In 1941, showed her support for the Tuskegee Airmen and flew with a Tuskegee instructor, C. Alfred "Chief " Anderson

Her action gave Tuskegee Airmen a publicity boost



## C. ALFRED “CHIEF” ANDERSON

U.S. Postal Stamp issued March 13, 2014 to commemorate Black aviation pilot C. Alfred Anderson who instructed and mentored young pilots including the Tuskegee Airmen.







# FIRST FIVE GRADUATES OF TUSKEGEE FLIGHT SCHOOL

LEFT TO RIGHT: CAPTAIN BENJAMIN O. DAVIS JR.  
2<sup>ND</sup> LT. LEMUEL R. CUSTIS  
1<sup>ST</sup> LT. GEORGE S. ROBERTS  
2<sup>ND</sup> LT. CHARLES DEBOW  
1<sup>ST</sup> LT. MAC ROSS

- Captain Benjamin O. Davis Jr. was the highest-ranking officer of the Army Air Force & a West Point graduate
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Custis earned a BS degree from Howard University before joining the Tuskegee Airmen
- 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. George Roberts earned a BS degree in mechanical arts and flew 100 missions over Africa, Europe, & Middle East
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Charles DeBow flew over 52 combat missions in Europe
- 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Mac Ross was the youngest squadron commander on the field
- In this first class, there were 12 cadets that were tested, only these 5 graduated

<https://www.tuskegee.edu/support-tu/tuskegee-airmen/tuskegee-airmen-pilot-listing>



## SUCCESSSES OF THE “RED TAILS”

- 996 pilots, 15,000 support personnel
- Activated six months after Pearl Harbor
- “pursuit squadron” later as “fighter squadron”
- Flew more than 15,000 sorties
- Received more than 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses



# COL. GEORGE ROBERTS



- One of the first cadets to join the program
- Flew 78 combat missions over Europe in WWII
- Member of the 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron
- Commanded the 99<sup>th</sup> Squadron & the 332<sup>nd</sup> Group
- Commanded the racially mixed unit at Langley, 1950
- Returned to combat in Korean War
- Received the Distinguished Flying Cross
- Retired after 26-year military career and became a Wells Fargo banker



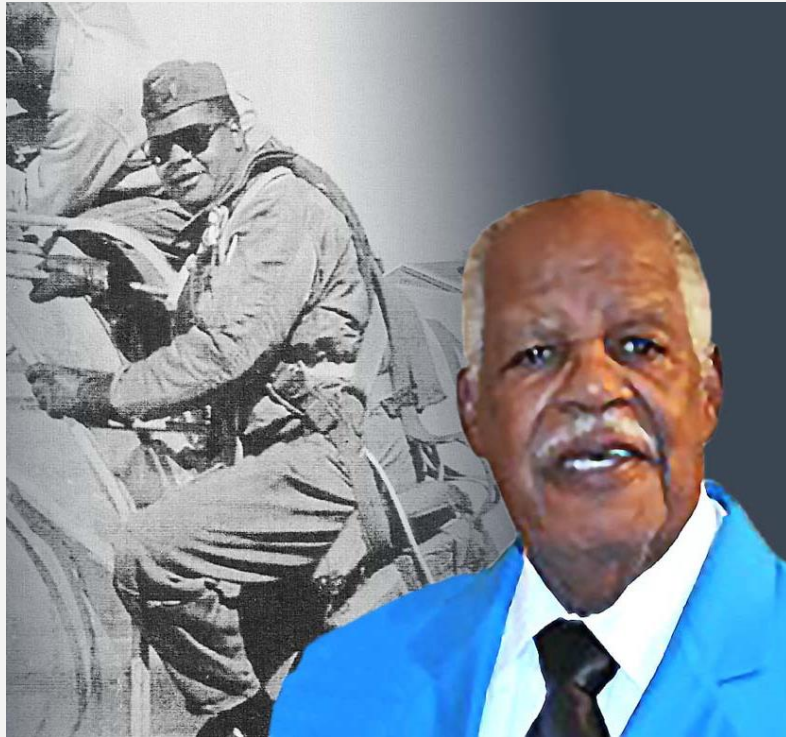
# LT. CHARLES HALL



- Grew up during the depression
- One of the first cadets to join the program
- Became first black to shoot down enemy aircraft, a Nazi plane
- Member of the 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron
- Awarded distinguished Flying Cross
- Honored by General Dwight D. Eisenhower



# LT. COL. DONALD C. THOMAS, JR.



Recruited in the North  
and brought to South  
unprepared for racism

Flew 19 aircraft planes  
in 37 years of service

Served in WWII, Korean  
War, Vietnam War



# GENERAL CHARLES MCGEE

ONE OF THE LAST SURVIVING MEMBERS OF TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

- \*Born in Cleveland, Ohio
- \*Served in World War II, Korean War, & Vietnam
- \* Flew over 409 combat missions in three wars
- \* Honored at State of the Union Address by President Trump along with his 13-year-old great-grandson on February 5, 2020



# HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

- America's first black military pilots and their support personnel were invaluable to the war effort's success.
- The Tuskegee pilots' record was impressive, with only 27 bombers shot down. By comparison, white escort groups had double the loss rate of bombers.
- During their Service from 1941 to 1949, only 66 of the 996 pilots were lost in combat while downing 103 enemy aircraft. These Tuskegee Airmen, with their strength of character, courage, and ability, were able to triumph over adversity and inspire others to achieve goals in their own lives.
- Armelia Thomas, widow of Lt. Col Thomas, said, "It's important young people know their history, or you won't know who you are."
- If the "experiment" would have failed, the opportunities for blacks in the military might have been lost.

*(Nine Myths About Tuskegee Airmen, by Daniel L. Haulman, Ph.D.)*





# SUMMARY

- People today stand on the shoulders of those that went before them
- The Tuskegee Airmen were pioneers in the field of aviation and opened doors for others
- Many experienced different levels of discrimination during the “separate but equal” era
- With strength of character, courage and ability, they inspired others to achieve their goals
- Armelia Thomas, wife of Lt. Col Donald C. Thomas Jr., said, “You can be anything you want to be if you pursue it...education is the key to do your best...these men loved their country.”

