AWESOME stories

MEET the RED TAILS



0. MEET the RED TAILS - Story Preface

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Robert Bailey created this painting which illustrates 1st Lt. Charles E. McGee—a Tuskegee Airman—on a bomb run near Vienna during WWII. Firing 50-caliber bullets at a train with many box cars, McGee's six guns (on his Mustang) connected with ammunition on board the train. Mustangs following in McGee's wake were forced to climb in order to stay clear of the debris and shrapnel. Copyright, Robert Bailey, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with Bailey's aviation artwork. Click on the image for a much-better view.

Even while risking - and giving - their lives for their country, the men of the 332nd Fighter Group faced ongoing discrimination against African-Americans. They had to fight to be given the chance *to fight*. They had to fight to be given the chance *to fly*. They had to fight to be given the chance *to fly in combat*.

Beyond all of that, they had to convincingly answer two important questions posed by the Tuskegee Experiment:

> *Did African-Americans have the will and ability to fly - and - could they successfully handle combat missions?*

Paving the way for others who followed, the Tuskegee Airmen not only proved their abilities, they impressively handled combat missions.

In all, the Tuskegee Experiment graduated 650 single-engine pilots; 217 twin-engine pilots; 60 auxiliary pilots and 5 pilots from another country (Haiti). Who were some of their leaders?

- Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr
- Major George "Spanky" Roberts
- Captain Charles B. Hall
- Lt. Clarence D. ("Lucky") Lester
- Lt. Lee Archer
- Captain Wendell Pruitt
- Captain Roscoe Brown
- Captain John Rogers, Sr.
- Lt. Herbert E. Carter
- Lt. Gwynne Pierson
- Lt. Charles V. Brantley

- Lt. Earl R. Lane

More significant than their impressive statistics for shot-down German planes, the Red Tails and their escort missions saved thousands of lives.

Pilots on bomb runs had to keep their planes flying straight and level while they dropped their ordnance onto enemy targets. At the mercy of fighter planes (in the sky) and anti-aircraft fire (from the ground), bomb crews were always vulnerable. So good was their protection from the Red Tails, however, that only twenty-five of *those* escorted bombers were lost in aerial attacks.

During the war years, the Tuskegee Airmen found their own way to answer the claims of people like Spike Momyer. Herbert Carter summarizes their approach:

> *The best antidote to racism is excellence in one's performance.*

With the actual performance of Tuskegee's Airmen in view, President Truman issued Executive Order 9981 (on July 26, 1948). In a single document, he ended the standard practice of racial inequality in America's military.

All along, many of the Tuskegee Airmen knew they were fighting two simultaneous battles - one for their country, the other for their race. They called it the "Double Victory."

At the end of the war, they had helped to prevail in both. As Lt. Col. William H. Holloman (retired Tuskegee Airman) observed:

> *America's not perfect. But I'll hold her hand until she gets well.*

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/MEET-the-RED-TAILS-Red-Tails

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/MEET-the-RED-TAILS-Red-Tails

Questions 2 Ponder

What Does It Take to Rise above Prejudice?

Despite the prejudicial atmosphere in which they lived, the Tuskegee Airmen rose above the prejudice to prove their worth to the bomb crews which they escorted.

Although white pilots who escorted bomb crews in Europe, during WWII, sometimes left their positions to engage with enemy planes, the Tuskegee Airmen did not. They ignored what could have been personal glory to stick to their mission of protecting the bombers.

During later years, some of the highly skilled Tuskegee Airmen talked about their experiences. Herbert Carter said: “The best antidote to racism is excellence in one’s performance.” What did he mean by that statement?

Lt. Col. William H. Holloman said: “America's not perfect. But I’ll hold her hand until she gets well.” Do you think it was difficult for these men not only to rise above the prejudice which was aimed their way but also to live-out their beliefs in such exemplary fashion? Why, or why not?

Can you think of areas in your own life, or in the lives of your family and friends, where that same sentiment—things aren’t right, but I’ll “hang in there” until things turn around—applies? If so, what would they be?

Did rising above the prejudice prove to be valuable for you or your friends? How so?

Media Stream



Major George "Spanky" Roberts - Emanuelle Stance

Photo of Major George "Spanky" Robinson at the yoke of his P-51B Mustang by Toni Frissell. Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.
View this asset at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Major-George-Spanky-Roberts-Emanuelle-Stance



Captain Wendell Pruitt - Joe "Lightning" Little

Photo of Captain Wendell O. Pruitt online, courtesy Library of Congress.
View this asset at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Captain-Wendell-Pruitt-Joe-Lightning-Little



Captain Charles B. Hall - Tuskegee Airman

Photo of Cpt Hall, Maj. Gen. Cannon and other Tuskegee Airmen online, courtesy Library of Congress.
View this asset at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Captain-Charles-B.-Hall-Tuskegee-Airman



Lt. Clarence D. "Lucky" Lester

Photo by U.S. Army Air Force photographer, online courtesy National Museum of the U.S. Air Force.
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Lt. Lee Archer - Gruesome Twosome

Photo of Lt. Lee Archer, online courtesy Library of Congress.
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Captain Roscoe Brown - Tuskegee Airman

Image of Cpt. Roscoe Brown - later Dr. Roscoe Brown - online courtesy Library of Congress.
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http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Captain-Roscoe-Brown-Tuskegee-Airman



Captain John Rogers, Sr. - Tuskegee Airman

Photo of John Rogers, Sr., by armament officer William Thompson, maintained by Chanute Air Museum.
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http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Captain-John-Rogers-Sr.-Tuskegee-Airman



Lt. Herbert E. Carter - Tuskegee Airman

Image of Herbert and Mildred Carter, online courtesy Herbert Carter via "Creative Cow."
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Lt. Charles V. Brantley - Tuskegee Airman

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Nightfighters - Bomb Runs and Red Tails

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Double Victory - Tuskegee Airmen

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