



Colonel Benjamin Oliver Davis, Jr. was commander of the 332nd Fighter Group, composed entirely of Tuskegee Airmen. The character of Colonel A.J. Bullard, in the *Red Tails* film, is based on Davis.

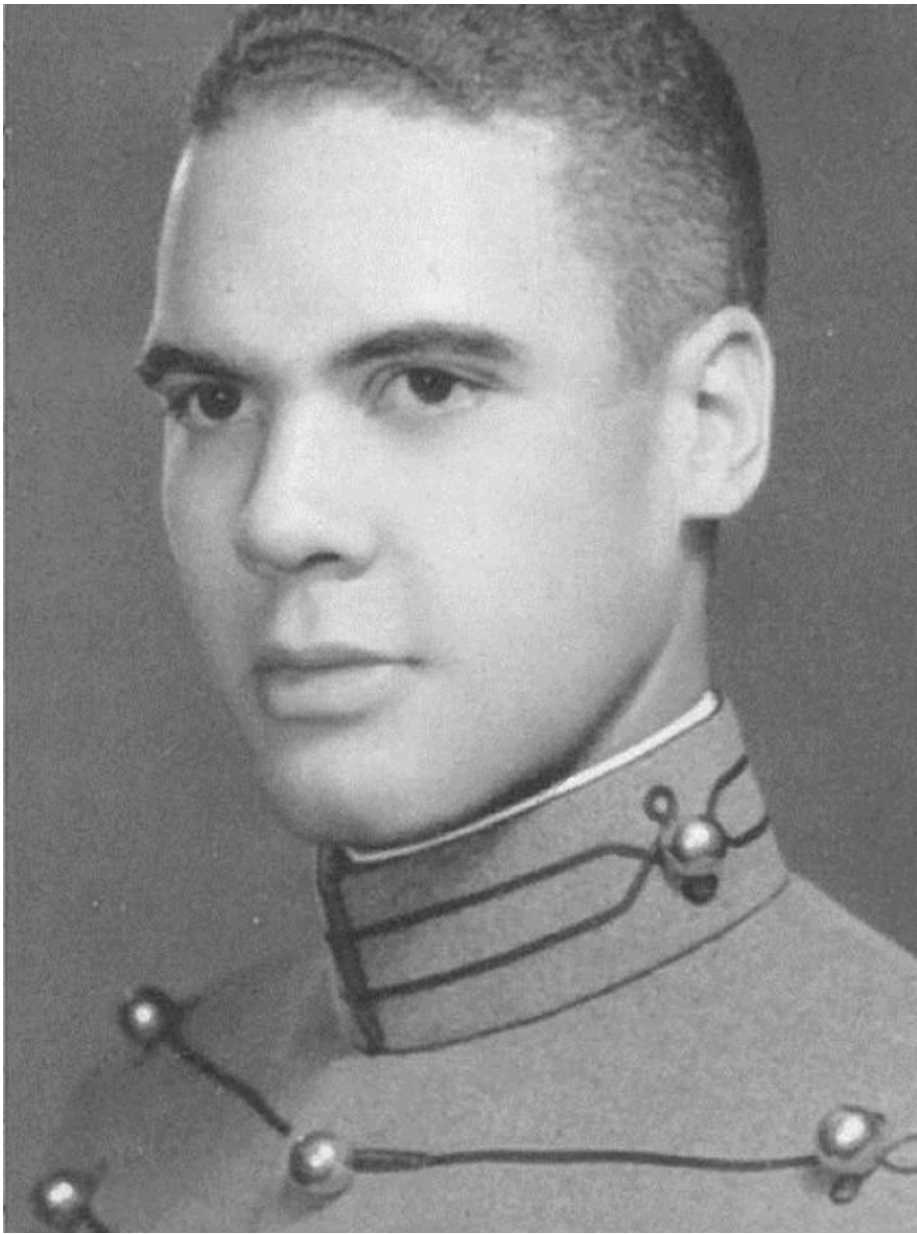
After the Army and Air Force separated, into different branches of military service, Davis became the Air Force's first black general. In 1998, he received his fourth star.

A highly effective leader, Davis was born on December 18, 1912. When he was young, he took a ride in a barnstorming plane and was hooked. He wanted to be a pilot.

On 7 March 1942, he was the first officer to graduate from Tuskegee's aviation program. That education followed a stint at the University of Chicago, then four years at the U.S. Military Academy (West Point) where he was the only African-American.

He was shunned, by his fellow cadets, the entire time. In his autobiography, Davis had this to say about the shunning:

I was to be silenced solely because the cadets did not want blacks at West Point. Their only purpose was to freeze me out. What they did not realize was that I was stubborn enough to put up with their treatment to reach the goal I had come to obtain. (See *Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., American*, by Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., at page 49.)



How did that treatment impact Davis? For him, it was like living in solitary confinement:

Living as a prisoner in solitary confinement for four years had not destroyed my personality, nor poisoned my attitude toward other people. (Davis, Jr., at [page 21](#).)

He won the respect of his classmates, however, as noted by this comment in West Point's 1936 yearbook:

The courage, tenacity, and intelligence with which he conquered a problem incomparably more difficult than plebe year won for him the sincere admiration of his classmates, and his single-minded determination to continue in his chosen career cannot fail to inspire respect wherever fortune may lead him.

Discrimination continued after his West Point graduation. Desiring to fly, he was rejected by the Army Air Corps because of his skin color.

One of only two black line officers in the entire Army Air Force - his father was the other - Davis was ultimately sent to Tuskegee, to teach military tactics. After the federal government allowed African-Americans to learn how to fly military planes, in the Tuskegee Experiment, Davis became a student, again, and was the first black officer to solo in a military plane.

Davis commanded the 332nd Fighter Group until the war was over. Thereafter, he assumed command of the 477th Bombardment Group - another all-black unit - which was based in Kentucky.

After President Truman desegregated the military, Davis helped to draft a plan which would implement the Executive Order in the Air Force.

Col. Davis served in Korea, during the Conflict in that country, and in various positions at the Pentagon (and overseas) for the next two decades. He retired from active duty on February 1, 1970 as a three-star general.



President Clinton personally pinned-on his fourth star, nearly twenty years later - on December 9, 1998.



Later in his life, the General suffered from Alzheimer's Disease. He died, at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, on the 4th of July, 2002.

During his burial service - at Arlington National Cemetery - a red-tailed P-15 Mustang flew overhead. Of Davis, President Clinton said:

General Davis is here today as living proof that a person can overcome adversity and discrimination, achieve great things, turn skeptics into believers; and through example and perseverance, one person can bring truly extraordinary change.

Click on the top image for a better view.

Credits:

Top-of-page image, of Benjamin Oliver Davis, Jr., online, courtesy National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institute.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Col.-Benjamin-O.-Davis-Jr-A.J.-Bullard>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Col.-Benjamin-O.-Davis-Jr-A.J.-Bullard>

Media Stream



Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. - Flight Student

Image of Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., as a West Point cadet, in 1936. Online, courtesy US Army.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Benjamin-O.-Davis-Jr.-Flight-Student>



Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. Rises above Racism

Following in his father's footsteps, to become an effective member of the U.S. military, Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. experienced racism at many levels.

After President Truman outlawed military segregation, in 1948, Davis helped his country to integrate servicemen in the Air Force.

Serving with distinction, for many years, Davis achieved the rank of Lt Gen of the Air Force, during his active-duty service.

Twenty-eight years after he retired in 1970, President Clinton awarded Davis a fourth star in 1998.

This image, online via the U.S. Air Force, depicts General Davis.

Image online via the U.S. Air Force.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Benjamin-O.-Davis-Jr.-Rises-above-Racism>

Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. Becomes a 4-Star General

Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. retired as an Air Force Lieutenant General in 1970. He had served his country, with distinction, for many decades.

Twenty-eight years later, President Clinton awarded Davis a fourth star—making him a full General of the Air Force—at a [White House ceremony](#) in December of 1998. Twenty of the Tuskegee Airmen, who had served under Davis during WWII, were at the White House to witness their former commander receive his honor.

Donning the distinctive red jacket associated with Tuskegee Airmen—because of the red tails on their military planes—President Clinton honored Davis with these (among other) words:

He earned this honor a long time ago. I am very, very proud, General Davis, of your service. I thank you on behalf of all Americans.

This image depicts the moment when General Davis received his fourth star.

In 2015, when West Point announced that a new six-story barracks would be named to honor General Davis, one of the original Tuskegee Airmen, [Needham Jones](#), commented on how Davis' leadership positively impacted his men:

"He tried to tell us that it was not going be easy, because we had not been accepted as full citizens of the United States," said Needham Jones, 96, who served under Davis in the 99th Pursuit Squadron in ground support and the motor pool.

"He said, 'Don't you let nobody tell you — don't you never believe — that you are inferior to anybody else,' ... it meant a [heck] of a lot to us," Jones said.

General Davis remains an inspiration to people even though he is no-longer alive.

Click on the image for a better view.

Photo of General Davis receiving his fourth star, from President Clinton, by Greg Gibson/AP. Online via The Army Times.

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