

THE TWELVE GREATEST AIR BATTLES OF THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

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Introduction

The 332d Fighter Group was the only African-American group in the Army Air Forces in World War II to enter combat overseas. It eventually consisted of four fighter squadrons, the 99th, 100th, 301st, and 302d. Before the 332d Fighter Group deployed, the 99th Fighter Squadron, had already taken part in combat for many months. The primary mission of the 99th Fighter Squadron before June 1944 was to launch air raids on ground targets or to defend Allied forces on the ground from enemy air attacks, but it also escorted medium bombers on certain missions in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. When the 332d Fighter Group first deployed to Italy in early 1944, it also flew patrol, close air support, and interdiction tactical missions for the Twelfth Air Force. Between early June 1944 and late April 1945, the 332d Fighter Group, which the 99th Fighter Squadron joined, flew a total of 311 missions with the Fifteenth Air Force. The primary function of the group then, along with six other fighter groups of the Fifteenth Air Force, was to escort heavy bombers, including B-17s and B-24s, on strategic raids against enemy targets in Germany, Austria, and parts of Nazi-occupied central, southern, and Eastern Europe.

This paper focuses on the twelve greatest air battles of the Tuskegee Airmen. They include the eleven missions in which the 332d Fighter Group, or the 99th Fighter Squadron before deployment of the group, shot down at least four enemy aircraft. They

also include the longest mission of the group, to Berlin in March 1945, for which the 332d earned the Distinguished Unit Citation.

This information is based on the daily narrative mission reports of the 99th and later of the 332d Fighter Group, the monthly histories of the 332d Fighter Group, with which the daily narrative mission reports are filed, daily mission folders of the Fifteenth Air Force, Twelfth and Fifteenth Air Force general orders that awarded aerial victory credits, and Missing Air Crew Reports, which are indexed by date and group to show which aircraft were lost, and when, where, and how they were lost.

January 27, 1944

At 0735 hours on the morning of January 27, 1944, the 99th Fighter Squadron launched sixteen P-40 Warhawks from its airfield at Capodichino to patrol the St. Peter's Beach near the Allied beachhead at Anzio, south of Rome, Italy. At time, the 99th was serving with the 79th Fighter Group. At 0830 hours, the squadron intercepted fifteen German FW-190 fighters that had begun to attack Allied ships. Firing .50 caliber machine gun shells, the Tuskegee Airmen chased the German fighters northward toward Rome. That afternoon, a similar dogfight erupted over the beaches of Anzio and Nettuno, as German fighters again threatened Allied forces on the ground. The 99th Fighter Squadron was one of eight Allied fighter squadrons that intercepted the German FW-190s, but it shot down ten of the enemy aircraft, more than any of the other squadrons that day.¹

Among the victors were 1st Lieutenant Howard Baugh, who shot down one enemy aircraft and shared another with 2d. Lieutenant Clarence W. Allen. Other members of the 99th with victories that day included 1st Lieutenant Willie Ashley Jr., 2d Lieutenant

Charles P. Bailey, Captain Lemuel R. Custis, 1st Lieutenant Robert W. Deiz, 2d Lieutenant Wilson V. Eagleson, 1st Lieutenant Leon C. Roberts, 2d Lieutenant Lewis C. Smith, and 1st Lieutenant Edward L. Toppins, each of whom shot down one enemy airplane. On this day the Tuskegee Airmen proved that they could fly and fight as well as any of the other fighter squadrons with which they served. The day was not without loss, however. Lieutenants Samuel Bruce and Allen Lane both bailed out of their damaged aircraft, and Bruce was later found dead.²

June 9, 1944

At 0700 hours on June 9, 1944, 39 P-47 Thunderbolts of the 332d Fighter Group's 301st and 302d Fighter Squadrons took off from Ramitelli Airfield in the Foggia area of southeastern Italy on a mission "to provide penetration escort for the 5th, 57th, 304th, 49th, and 55th Bomber Wings to the Munich Area" of Germany. Four of the fighters returned early, three with mechanical problems, and one to escort them back safely. The two Tuskegee Airmen squadrons rendezvoused with the bombers they were assigned to escort at 0830 hours at a point on the way to the target area. They were flying at an altitude of 22,000 feet. Only thirty-five 332d Fighter Group fighters attempted to protect hundreds of bombers, and the fighters had to spread out in an attempt to cover them. The Tuskegee Airmen found it difficult to move from one bomber formation to another at the 20,000 foot altitude. Although the formations were good, "there were too many to be covered by two fighter squadrons."³

As the bombers and their escorts approached the Udine area of northern Italy, German Me-109 fighters dived on a formation of B-24s from the 5 o'clock position. Lt. Wendell Pruitt chased one of the enemy aircraft and hit its left wing, which burst into

flames, forcing the pilot to bail out. At approximately 1000 hours, Lt. Charles Bussey led eight of the P-47s against four Me-109s. Bussey hit the tail of one of the German fighters, causing it to explode. The pilot bailed out. Lt. Melvin T. Jackson was flying at 27,000 feet when he heard the call to attack. He chased some of the Me-109s upward, but his airplane started to stall in the climb. He injected the water boost and dived into a cloud bank. When he emerged, he spotted an Me-109 and gave chase. When he hit it with his machine gun bullets, it burst into flames, and the pilot bailed out. In the meantime, Lt. Frederick D. Funderburg engaged in combat with two of the Me-109s. In the running dogfight, Funderburg found himself at times chasing them and at times flying head on with them. He shot down both of the fighters, which crashed into the sea. Funderburg spotted only one parachute. Lt. Robert H. Wiggins almost shot down an additional Me-109. As he chased it firing his machine guns, he could see pieces of the enemy airplane flying off and it began smoking. But neither Wiggins nor any witnesses noticed the airplane go down or the pilot bail out, so he claimed only to have damaged the German fighter. The 332d Fighter Group score for the day was five Me-109s destroyed and one damaged.⁴

At 0925, the Tuskegee Airmen left the bombers to be escorted by other fighter groups, who took their turns as the mission continued. As many as 100 German fighters challenged the bombers on the way to the target area. A total of seventeen Fifteenth Air Force bombers failed to return that day, but fifteen of those lost had been under escort by other fighter groups. Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., who had led the 332d Fighter Group's 301st and 302d Fighter Squadrons on the mission, earned the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism that day because he "so skillfully disposed his squadrons that in

spite of the large number of enemy fighters, the bomber formation suffered only a few losses.” During the time the 332d Fighter Group escorted the bombers, between 0830 and 0925, enemy airplanes shot down only two of the B-17s, both of which belonged to the 304th Bombardment Wing’s 459th Bombardment Group. Only one of the 332d Fighter Group pilots failed to return to base that day, Lt. Cornelius G. Rogers. Two other P-47s were heavily damaged by flak.⁵

July 12, 1944

On July 12, 1944, forty-two P-51 fighters of the 332d Fighter Group’s 100th, 301st, and 302d Fighter Squadrons took off from Ramitelli Airdrome at 0751 hours on a mission “to provide close cover, escort, penetration, target cover, and withdrawal for B-24s of the 49th Bomb Wing” that was assigned to bomb the marshalling yards at Nimes in southern France. In fact, the 332d Fighter Group was the only group to escort the 49th Bombardment Wing on its mission that day. Eight of the fighters returned early (6 spares, 2 mechanical problems). The rest rendezvoused with their assigned bombers at 1011 hours at 23,000 feet as briefed. Because of the heavy overcast, the bombers were in fair rather than good formation. The 100th Fighter Squadron flew in the middle escort position, while the 301st flew lead, and the 302d flew high. Because of heavy clouds, bad weather, and poor visibility, the formations found it difficult to stay together. Only 17 of the 332d Fighter Group fighters were with the bombers on penetration, target cover, and withdrawal.⁶

The bombers successfully bombed the target at Nimes, but not without opposition. Near the target, some 28 enemy FW-190 fighters attacked the formation from above, diving through it. 1st Lieutenant Joseph D. Elsberry earned a Distinguished

Flying Cross for shooting down three of the interceptors that day. 1st Lieutenant Harold E. Sawyer shot down another FW-190. These were the first 332d Fighter Group aerial victories in the P-51 Mustang, since before that the group had flown P-47s for the Fifteenth Air Force.⁷

Despite the Tuskegee Airmen fighter escort, enemy aircraft shot down three B-24s, and antiaircraft artillery got a fourth. The Tuskegee Airmen escorts did not leave the bombers until they reached the island of Corsica in the Mediterranean Sea. One of the 332d Fighter Group pilots, Lt. Rhodes, was forced to bail out of his crippled aircraft near Viterbo.⁸

July 18, 1944

At 0750 hours on the morning of July 18, 1944, 66 P-51 Mustangs of the 332d Fighter Group's 99th, 100th, 301st, and 302d Fighter Squadrons took off from Ramitelli Airfield in Italy for a mission "to furnish penetration, target cover, and withdrawal for the 5th Bomb Wing to Memmingen A/D [airdrome]." This was the first mission of the 99th Fighter Squadron as a complete unit in long range escort with the Fifteenth Air Force (the 99th had served the Twelfth Air Force previously). Eight of the group's fighters returned early, six with mechanical trouble, and two spares. The remaining Mustangs continued toward the rendezvous with the bombers, which were all B-17s. As the airplanes approached the Udine and Treviso areas, between 0950 and 1000 hours, 30 to 35 German Me-109 fighters attacked, coming in groups of two and five. They made their attacks from the 3 o'clock high and 5 o'clock low positions. When the Tuskegee Airmen intercepted the enemy airplanes, their pilots attempted to escape by flying split Ss, but their evasive tactics were poor. 21 of the 332 Fighter Group fighters took part in that

encounter, and afterwards returned to base, leaving 36 P-51s to escort the bombers assigned. During the engagement with the fighters over northeastern Italy, the 332d Fighter Group pilots claimed to have shot down nine of the enemy airplanes.⁹

The rendezvous with the 5th Bombardment Wing B-17s was initially scheduled for 0925 hours, but because of the previous encounters, and the fact some of the bombers also were late, the rendezvous was later, possibly 1005. There were six bombardment groups in the wing, and they were very scattered, making only the first formations good and easy to cover. The 301st Fighter Squadron flew lead position, the 99th flew low, the 100th flew high, and the 302d flew middle. The 52d Fighter Group was also assigned to escort the B-17s of the 5th Bombardment Wing on penetration to the target, but once there, if the other fighter group was present, to leave the bombers and conduct a fighter sweep in front of the bombers. Around 1030 hours, the 52d Fighter Group left the bombers, according to the original plan. This left only the P-51s of the 332d Fighter Group to escort the six groups of the 5th Bombardment Wing. The 332d Fighter Group had all 36 of its remaining mission fighters over the target area by 1035 hours.

One of the 5th Bombardment Wing's six groups, the 483d, was late arriving. It did not even reach the initial point, on the route before the target, until 1045. At that point, as many as 100 German FW-190 and Me-109 fighters struck the group. Once aware of the attack, the 332d Fighter Group pilots came to the rescue of the B-17s. The 52d Fighter Group, which was still in the area for the assigned fighter sweep, also came to the aid of the B-17s. Two other Fifteenth Air Force fighter groups, assigned to escort B-24s to other targets, also arrived to take part in the air battle, because the B-24s were late. The 1st and 31st Fighter Groups, which flew P-38s and P-51s respectively, joined the

332d and 52d Fighter Groups in the battle, defending the B-17s of the 5th Bombardment Wing against the German fighters attacking them.

The 332d Fighter Group reported some 30 to 40 enemy airplanes rising to challenge the bombers in the target area. The enemy interceptors included Me-109s, FW-190s, FW-189s, and Me-210s. Four of the FW-190s dived from approximately 26,000 feet on the escorted bombers at 25,000 feet. Other FW-190s provided top cover. In the air battles that day, over Udine in Italy and Memmingen in Germany, members of the 332d Fighter Group shot down a total of 12 of the enemy airplanes. Among the victors were 2d Lieutenant Clarence D. “Lucky” Lester, who shot down three in one day, and 1st Lieutenant Jack D. Holsclaw, who shot down two. Other 332d Fighter Group pilot victors included 2d Lieutenant Lee A. Archer, 1st Lieutenant Charles P. Bailey, 1st Lieutenant Weldon K. Groves, 2d Lieutenant Walter J. A. Palmer, 2d Lieutenant Roger Romine, Captain Edward L. Toppins, and 2d. Lieutenant Hugh S. Warner, who each earned one aerial victory credit that day. Three of the 332d Fighter Group’s pilots went missing, including Lieutenants Hutton, Irving, and Browne. Unfortunately, fifteen of the B-17s in the escorted wing were also shot down by enemy aircraft that day, fourteen of them in the 483d Bombardment Group, and one in the 301st.¹⁰

July 20, 1944

Fifty-three P-51s took off from Ramitelli Airfield at 0835 on July 20, 1944 on a mission to provide penetration escort to the 55th, 304th, and 47th Bomb Wings to Friedrichshafen, and then to conduct a fighter sweep northeast of the target. All four of the 332d Fighter Group’s squadrons, the 99th, 100th, 301st, and 302d, took part. Nine Mustangs returned early, 4 with mechanical problems, 3 to escort them, and 2 spares.

Forty-four P-51s rendezvoused with the bombers at 0947 hours at an altitude of 22,000 feet, as briefed, and the bombers were on time. The fighters were dispersed in the formations so as to offer the maximum cover for so many bombers. At 1020 hours, 20 of the escorts engaged in combat with enemy aircraft. Twenty-four Mustangs continued with the bombers toward the target area. According to the group's narrative mission report for the day, there were "too many wings to cover adequately."¹¹

At 1045 at an altitude of 27,000 feet, southwest of Udine, twenty enemy fighters attacked the rear wave of bombers from the rear and low. Groups of enemy fighters stayed off to the side as decoys, while the attackers came in string at high speed. Other German airplanes provided top cover in the vicinity of 34,000 feet. Although the enemy fighters attacked the bombers aggressively, they sought escape when attacked by the P-51s. The Tuskegee pilots shot down four Me-109s, one each by Captains Joseph D. Elsberry, Armour G. McDaniel, and Edward L. Toppins, and one by 1st Lieutenant Langdon E. Johnson. Together with the three victories he scored on July 12, Elsberry raised his aerial victory total to 4, the first of the 332d Fighter Group pilots to do so. No Tuskegee Airmen fell on July 20, but two B-24s in the escorted bomber formations were shot down by enemy aircraft before the escort duty of the 332d Fighter Group ended. Other escorted bombers were shot down by flak.¹²

July 26, 1944

At 0855 hours on July 26, 1944, 68 P-51s of the 332d Fighter Group's 99th, 100th, 301st, and 302d Fighter Squadrons took off from Ramitelli on a mission to provide penetration, target, and withdrawal cover for the 47th Bomb Wing on a raid against Markendorf Airdrome, Austria. Twenty-one of the Mustangs returned early. Forty-seven

of the Mustangs were over the target area or in the vicinity from 1100 to 1150 hours. At 1100, more than 18 enemy Me-109 fighters attacked the escorts, while nine other German fighters, also Me-109s, attacked the bombers, usually in pairs. When engaged by the P-51s, the enemy fighters dived to the deck or performed split S maneuvers. One Me-109 was more aggressive than the others.¹³

This was a day of triumph and tragedy. On the positive side, the Tuskegee Airmen shot down four ME-109s. Captain Edward L. Toppins, First Lieutenants Freddie E. Hutchins and Leonard M. Jackson, and 2d Lieutenant Roger Romine each shot down one. The victory for Captain Edward L. Toppins was his fourth. On the negative side, 2d Lieutenant Charles B. Jackson of the 100th Fighter Squadron was lost. A bomber might have also been lost to enemy aircraft fire. The 332d Fighter Group narrative mission report for the day noted “1 B-24 seen spiraling out of formation in target area after attack by enemy aircraft at 1100, no chutes seen to open.”¹⁴

July 27, 1944

Fifty-two P-51 Mustangs of the 332d Fighter Group’s 99th, 100th, 301st and 302d Fighter Squadrons took off from Ramitelli at 0714 hours on July 27, 1944 on a mission to provide penetration, target, and withdrawal cover for the bombers of the 47th Bomb Wing to the Mannfred Weiss Armament Works in the Budapest area of Hungary. Seven of the escort fighters returned early. The rest rendezvoused with the bombers at 24,000 feet on the way to the target.¹⁵

North of Lake Balaton, more than 25 Me-109s and FW-190s attacked the bomber formation from all directions. They approached in pairs. A squadron of the 332d Fighter Group intercepted the enemy fighters. In the ensuing dogfight, which lasted from 0933 to

0945 hours, the Tuskegee Airmen shot down eight aircraft, including 4 FW-190s and 4 Me-109s. They also damaged two other enemy fighters, one FW-190 and one ME-109. 37 P-51s accompanied the bombers over the target area between 950 and 1010 hours.¹⁶

Coming out of the target area, the B-24s were attacked by twelve FW-190s. The 332d Fighter Group escorts counterattacked and dispersed them. During the mission, the Tuskegee Airmen encountered a total of 40 enemy airplanes, and shot down a fifth of them. 1st Lieutenant Edward C. Gleed and 2d Lieutenant Alfred M. Gorham each shot down two FW-190s. Captain Claude B. Govan, 1st Lieutenants Leonard M. Jackson and Felix J. Kirkpatrick, and 2d Lieutenant Richard W. Hall each shot down one of the Me-109s. None of the escorted bombers was shot down by enemy aircraft that day, but one Tuskegee Airmen went missing.¹⁷

October 12, 1944

The mission of the 332d Fighter Group and its four squadrons on October 12, 1944 was to strafe railroad traffic and other targets from Budapest, Hungary to Bratislava, Slovakia. Sixty-eight P-51s took off from Ramitelli at 1227 hours, and five returned early. Formations of P-51s went off in different directions to attack various enemy targets on the ground, including airfields, railroad facilities, motor vehicles, barges, and a factory. Their pilots claimed destruction of many enemy aircraft, railroad cars, motor vehicles, locomotives and oil barges on the surface.¹⁸

The 302d Fighter Squadron encountered a lone twin-engine HE-111 near Tapolca, Hungary, and Capt. Wendell O. Pruitt peeled off to attack it. When he did, nine other enemy airplanes arrived, including two other HE-111s and seven ME-109s that were probably escorting them. A furious air battle followed during the next fifteen minutes,

ranging between the altitudes of 7,000 and a few hundred feet. 1st Lieutenant Lee A. Archer shot down three of the ME-109s in rapid succession, bringing his total of enemy aircraft destroyed to four. Pruitt got the HE-111 he originally targeted, plus another ME-109 besides. Lieutenants William W. Green, Jr. and Luther Smith, Jr., like Pruitt, each shot down an HE-111, while Captain Milton R. Brooks and Lt. Roger Romine each downed an Me-109. The Tuskegee Airmen shot down a total of nine enemy aircraft that day. They claimed to have destroyed an additional 26 enemy airplanes on the ground, for which aerial victory credits were not awarded. Only one of the enemy airplanes, an ME-109, got away. Flak got the only Tuskegee Airman lost that day.¹⁹

March 24, 1945

On March 24, 1945, the 332d Fighter Group flew its longest mission. The fighter pilots escorted bombers all the way to Berlin, the German capital, to which they had never flown before. 59 red-tailed P-51 Mustangs of the 99th, 100th, and 301st Fighter Squadrons (the 302d Fighter Squadron was inactivated earlier in the month) took off from Ramitelli at 0930 hours to escort B-17s of the 5th Bombardment Wing on a raid against the Daimler-Benz tank factory. Five of the escorts returned early, with mechanical or cockpit trouble. Thirty-eight of the Tuskegee pilots rendezvoused with the assigned bombers at 1145 hours at an altitude of 20,000 feet. Sixteen other 332d Fighter Group P-51s were in the same area. Although they did not rendezvous with the lead group of B-17s, they provided general route cover and were available to intercept enemy fighters.²⁰

At 1210, some twenty-five enemy airplanes, including jet Me-262s, rocket-propelled Me-163s, and FW-190s, rose to challenge the bombers as they approached the

target, and members of the 332d Fighter Group, despite the fact that some of them were to strafe targets on the ground after escorting the bombers to Berlin, intercepted the interceptors. The German jets and rockets were significantly faster than the P-51s, but they could not turn as fast. The air battle lasted until 1225 hours and extended over the Berlin target. Three of the 100th Fighter Squadron pilots each shot down one of the Me-262s, the first time members of the 332d Fighter Group destroyed any jets. The victors included 1st Lieutenants Roscoe C. Brown, Jr. and Earl R. Lane, and 2d Lieutenant Charles V. Brantley. The 332d Fighter Group pilots also claimed probable destruction of two other Me-262s and 1 Me-163, and to have damaged three additional Me-262s. It had turned out to be a very costly day for the German jet fighters.²¹

Some of the Tuskegee Airmen P-51s strafed targets in the German capital before heading for home. For this outstanding mission, the 332d Fighter Group earned its first and only Distinguished Unit Citation. The news was not all good, however. In an encounter with three of the German jets, Captain Armour G. McDaniel lost his right wing and went down. Four other members of the 332d Fighter Group went missing, but two landed at friendly fields. Three of the escorted B-17 bombers were shot down by German interceptors during the air battle. Two additional B-17s went down because of enemy antiaircraft artillery fire.²²

March 31, 1945

On March 31, 1945, 47 P-51 Mustangs of the 99th, 100th, and 301st Fighter Squadrons took off from Ramitelli for a fighter sweep of the Munich area and a strafing mission against rail targets in Bavaria. At 1353 hours, the three squadrons split up to take different areas of ground targets. German Me-109 and FW-190 fighters rose from nearby

fields to challenge the raiders. In terms of aerial victory credits, this was the best day of all for the Tuskegee Airmen. Members of the 332d Fighter Group shot down 13 airplanes, the most since the 12 they got on July 18, 1944. Six members of the 99th Fighter Squadron shot down five ME-109s and one FW-190, all of the enemy fighters that challenged them in their assigned western sector of the target area. The 100th Fighter Squadron also produced six victors that day. They shot down five FW-190s and two ME-109s.²³

Among the Tuskegee Airmen with victories that day was 1st Lieutenant Robert W. Williams, who shot down two FW-190s. Each of the other 332d Fighter Group pilot victors shot down one enemy aircraft. They included Major William A. Campbell, 1st Lieutenants Roscoe C. Brown, Jr., Earl R. Lane, and Daniel L. Rich, 2d Lieutenants Raul W. Bell, Thomas P. Brasswell, John W. Davis, James L. Hall, Hugh J. White, Bertram W. Wilson, Jr., and Flight Officer John H. Lyle. The eleven enemy fighters that challenged the 100th Fighter Squadron in its eastern sector of the target area were more aggressive than those that confronted the 99th, and four got away.²⁴

The day was not without cost to members of the 332d Fighter Group. One pilot was reported lost, two missing, and one at a friendly airfield. Forty-three of the P-51s returned to Ramitelli by 1825 hours.²⁵

April 1, 1945

At 1104 hours on April 1, 1945, 47 P-51s of the 99th, 100th, and 301st Fighter Squadrons of the 332d Fighter Group took off from Ramitelli on a mission “to provide close escort on penetration, target cover, and withdrawal for B-24s of the 47th Bomb Wing to St. Polten marshalling yard.” Two returned early, while the rest rendezvoused

with the bombers at 1300 hours at altitudes ranging from 18,000 to 21,000 feet. The bombers were fifteen minutes late to the assembly point. Eight of the 47 red-tailed P-51s that launched preceded the bombers and then flew a fighter sweep of the Linz area of Austria.²⁶

Flying at an altitude of 5,000 feet, the Mustang pilots spotted four FW-190s near Wels flying in the same direction but about 2,000 feet below them. They dived to attack, but at that point, 12 additional enemy aircraft appeared from a higher altitude. A series of individual dogfights ensued, ranging from altitudes of 5,000 feet to the deck. The enemy pilots attempted to out-turn the P-51s or to lead them over antiaircraft artillery. Seven members of the 301st Fighter Squadron shot down 12 enemy airplanes that day, including eight FW-190s and four ME-109s. 1st Lieutenant Harry T. Stewart shot down three FW-190s. 1st Lieutenant Charles L. White and 2d Lieutenants Carl E. Carey and John E. Edwards each shot down two enemy airplanes that day. 2d Lieutenants Walter P. Manning and Harold M. Morris each shot down an FW-190, as did Flight Officer James H. Fisher. Two additional FW-190s were damaged. Two of the 332d Fighter Group pilots bailed out after their planes were severely damaged, and one went missing. He was later found by partisans and returned to Ramitelli.²⁷

April 26, 1945

The final day for Tuskegee Airmen aerial victories was April 26, 1945. Six P-51s of the 100th and 301st Fighter Squadrons took off from Ramitelli at 0850 hours. They later rendezvoused with a P-38 (F-5) reconnaissance aircraft. Three of the P-51s peeled off to investigate an unidentified aircraft that turned out to be an Allied Mosquito. On their way back, at approximately 1205 and at an altitude of 23,000 feet, they encountered

five ME-109s that rocked their wings to appear to be friendly. Not fooled, the Mustang pilots turned toward the enemy, who took evasive action. Only one of the ME-109s escaped. 2d Lieutenant Thomas W. Jefferson shot down two of the enemy airplanes, and 1st Lieutenant Jimmy Lanham and 2d Lieutenant Richard A. Simons each shot down one. A few days later, the war ended.²⁸

Conclusion

During World War II, 72 Tuskegee Airmen shot down 112 enemy aircraft, including the best of the German fighters. Members of the 332d Fighter Group and 99th Fighter Squadron downed at least ten airplanes on four separate days in 1944 and 1945: 27 January and 18 July 1944, and 31 March and 1 April 1945. Three Tuskegee Airmen, the 301st Fighter Squadron's Captain Joseph D. Elsberry, the 99th Fighter Squadron's Captain Edward L. Toppins and the 302d Fighter Squadron's Lieutenant Lee A. Archer, each shot down four enemy planes. The Tuskegee Airmen proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that African-Americans were capable of flying the best of the Allied fighters to victory against the best of the enemy fighters.

Table I: Table of Greatest Air Battles of the Tuskegee Airmen

Date	15 AF Mission	Aerial victories	332d FG (or 99 FS losses, for 27 Jan 1944)	Escorted Bombers shot down by enemy aircraft	Planes launched/ effective sorties
27 Jan 1944	-	10		-	-
9 Jun 1944	3	5 Me-109s	1 missing	2 B-17s	39/35
12 Jul 1944	23	4 FW-190s	1 bailed out	3 B-24s	42/34
18 Jul 1944	28	12 (10 Me-109s and 2 FW-190s)	3 missing	15 B-17s	66/36
20 Jul 1944	30	4 Me-109s	0	2 B-24s	53/44
26 Jul 1944	37	4 Me-109s	1	-	68/47
27 Jul 1944	38	8 (4 Me-109s and 4 FW-190s)	1 missing	-	52/45
12 Oct 1944	92	9 (6 Me-109s, 3 HE-111s)	1 bailed out	-	68/63
24 Mar 1945	246	3 Me-262s	5 (1 lost, 4 missing)	3 B-17s	59/54
31 Mar 1945	252	13 (7 Me-109s, 6 FW-190s)	4 (1 lost, 2 missing, 1 at other field)	-	47/43
1 Apr 1945	253	12 (8 FW-190s and 4 ME-109s)	3 (1 crashed, 2 bailed out)	-	47/45
26 Apr 1945	309	4 Me-109s	0	-	6/6

Table II: Chronological Listing of Tuskegee Airmen Aerial Victory Credits

Date	Name	Unit	Downed	GO #
2 Jul 1943	1 Lt Charles B. Hall	99 FS	1 FW-190	32 XII ASC 7 Sep 43
27 Jan 1944	2 Lt Clarence W. Allen	99 FS	0.5 FW-190	66 XII AF 24 May 44
	1 Lt Willie Ashley Jr.	99 FS	1 FW-190	122 XII AF 7 Aug 44
	2 Lt Charles P. Bailey	99 FS	1 FW-190	66 XII AF 24 May 44
	1 Lt Howard Baugh	99 FS	1 FW-190 0.5 FW-190	122 XII AF 7 Aug 44 66 XII AF 24 May 44
	Cpt Lemuel R. Custis	99 FS	1 FW-190	122 XII AF 7 Aug 44
	1 Lt Robert W. Deiz	99 FS	1 FW-190	66 XII AF 24 May 44
	2 Lt Wilson V. Eagleson	99 FS	1 FW-190	66 XII AF 24 May 44
	1 Lt Leon C. Roberts	99 FS	1 FW-190	122 XII AF 7 Aug 44
	2 Lt Lewis C. Smith	99 FS	1 FW-190	66 XII AF 24 May 44
	1 Lt Edward L. Toppins	99 FS	1 FW-190	81 XII AF 22 Jun 44
28 Jan 1944	1 Lt Robert W. Deiz	99 FS	1 FW-190	122 XII AF 7 Aug 44
	Cpt Charles B. Hall	99 FS	1 FW-190 1 ME-109	64 XII AF 22 May 44
5 Feb 1944	1 Lt Elwood T. Driver	99 FS	1 FW-190	66 XII AF 24 May 44
7 Feb 1944	2 Lt Wilson V. Eagleson	99 FS	1 FW-190	122 XII AF 7 Aug 44
	2 Lt Leonard M. Jackson	99 FS	1 FW-190	66 XII AF 24 May 44
	1 Lt Clinton B. Mills	99 FS	1 FW-190	66 XII AF 24 May 44
9 Jun 1944	1 Lt Charles M. Bussy	302 FS	1 ME-109	1473 XV AF 30 Jun 44
	2 Lt Frederick D. Funderburg	301 FS	2 ME-109s	1473 XV AF 30 Jun 44
	1 Lt Melvin T. Jackson	302 FS	1 ME-109	1473 XV AF 30 Jun 44
	1 Lt Wendell O. Pruitt	302 FS	1 ME-109	1473 XV AF 30 Jun 44
12 Jul 1944	1 Lt Harold E. Sawyer	301 FS	1 FW-190	2032 XV AF 23 Jul 44
	1 Lt. Joseph D. Elsberry	301 FS	3 FW-190s	2466 XV AF Aug 44
16 Jul 1944	1 Lt Alfonza W. Davis	332 FG	1 MA-205	2030 XV AF 23 Jul 44
	2 Lt William W. Green Jr	302 FS	1 MA-202	2029 XV AF 23 Jul 44
17 Jul 1944	1 Lt Luther H. Smith Jr.	302 FS	1 ME-109	2350 XV AF 6 Aug 44
	2 Lt Robert H. Smith	302 FS	1 ME-109	2350 XV AF 6 Aug 44
	1 Lt Laurence D. Wilkins	302 FS	1 ME-109	2350 XV AF 6 Aug 44
18 Jul 1944	2 Lt Lee A. Archer	302 FS	1 ME-109	2350 XV AF 6 Aug 44

	1 Lt Charles P. Bailey	99 FS	1 FW-190	2484 XV AF 11 Aug 44
	1 Lt Weldon K. Groves	302 FS	1 ME-109	2350 XV AF 6 Aug 44
18 Jul 1944	1 Lt Jack D. Holsclaw	100 FS	2 ME-109s	2202 XV AF 31 Jul 44
	2 Lt Clarence D. Lester	100 FS	3 ME-109s	2202 XV AF 31 Jul 44
	2 Lt Walter J. A. Palmer	100 FS	1 ME-109	2202 XV AF 31 Jul 44
	2 Lt Roger Romine	302 FS	1 ME-109	2350 XV AF 6 Aug 44
	Cpt Edward L. Toppins	99 FS	1 FW-190	2484 XV AF 11 Aug 44*
	2 Lt Hugh S. Warner	302 FS	1 ME-109	2350 XV AF 6 Aug 44
20 Jul 1944	Cpt Joseph D. Elsberry	301 FS	1 ME-109	2284 XV AF 3 Aug 44
	1 Lt Langdon E. Johnson	100 FS	1 ME-109	2202 XV AF 31 Jul 44
	Cpt Armour G. McDaniel	301 FS	1 ME-109	2284 XV AF 3 Aug 44
	Cpt Edward L. Toppins	99 FS	1 ME-109	2484 XV AF 11 Aug 44
25 Jul 1944	1 Lt Harold E. Sawyer	301 FS	1 ME-109	2284 XV AF 3 Aug 44
26 Jul 1944	1 Lt Freddie E. Hutchins	302 FS	1 ME-109	2350 XV AF 6 Aug 44
	1 Lt Leonard M. Jackson	99 FS	1 ME-109	2484 XV AF 11 Aug 44
	2 Lt Roger Romine	302 FS	1 ME-109	2350 XV AF 6 Aug 44
	Cpt Edward L. Toppins	99 FS	1 ME-109	2484 XV AF 11 Aug 44
27 Jul 1944	1 Lt Edward C. Gleed	301 FS	2 FW-190s	2284 XV AF 3 Aug 44
	2 Lt Alfred M. Gorham	301 FS	2 FW-190s	2284 XV AF 3 Aug 44
	Cpt Claude B. Govan	301 FS	1 ME-109	2284 XV AF 3 Aug 44
	2 Lt Richard W. Hall	100 FS	1 ME-109	2485 XV AF 11 Aug 44
	1 Lt Leonard M. Jackson	99 FS	1 ME-109	2484 XV AF 11 Aug 44
	1 Lt Felix J. Kirkpatrick	302 FS	1 ME-109	2350 XV AF 6 Aug 44
30 Jul 1944	2 Lt Carl E. Johnson	100 FS	1 RE-2001	2485 XV AF 11 Aug 44
14 Aug 1944	2 Lt George M. Rhodes Jr.	100 FS	1 FW-190	2831 XV AF 25 Aug 44
23 Aug 1944	FO William L. Hill	302 FS	1 ME-109	3538 XV AF 21 Sep 44
24 Aug	1 Lt John F. Briggs	100 FS	1 ME-109	3153 XV AF 6 Sep 44

1944				
	1 Lt Charles E. McGee	302 FS	1 FW-190	3174 XV AF 7 Sep 44
	1 Lt William H. Thomas	302 FS	1 FW-190	449 XV AF 31 Jan 45
12 Oct 1944	1 Lt Lee A. Archer	302 FS	3 ME-109s	4287 XV AF 1 Nov 44
	Cpt Milton R. Brooks	302 FS	1 ME-109	4287 XV AF 1 Nov 44
	1 Lt William W. Green Jr.	302 FS	1 HE-111	4287 XV AF 1 Nov 44
	Cpt Wendell O. Pruitt	302 FS	1 HE-111 1 ME-109	4287 XV AF 1 Nov 44
	1 Lt Roger Romine	302 FS	1 ME-109	4287 XV AF 1 Nov 44
	1 Lt Luther H. Smith Jr.	302 FS	1 HE-111	4604 XV AF 21 Nov 44
16 Nov 1944	Cpt Luke J. Weathers	302 FS	2 ME-109s	4990 XV AF 13 Dec 44
16 Mar 1945	1 Lt William S. Price III	301 FS	1 ME-109	1734 XV AF 24 Mar 45
24 Mar 1945	2 Lt Charles V. Brantley	100 FS	1 ME-262	2293 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	1 Lt Roscoe C. Brown	100 FS	1 ME-262	2293 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	1 Lt Earl R. Lane	100 FS	1 ME-262	2293 XV AF 12 Apr 45
31 Mar 1945	2 Lt Raul W. Bell	100 FS	1 FW-190	2293 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	2 Lt Thomas P. Brasswell	99 FS	1 FW-190	2292 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	1 Lt Roscoe C. Brown	100 FS	1 FW-190	2293 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	Maj William A. Campbell	99 FS	1 ME-109	2292 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	2 Lt John W. Davis	99 FS	1 ME-109	2292 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	2 Lt James L. Hall	99 FS	1 ME-109	2292 XV AF 12 Apr 45
31 Mar 1945	1 Lt Earl R. Lane	100 FS	1 ME-109	2293 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	FO John H. Lyle	100 FS	1 ME-109	2293 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	1 Lt Daniel L. Rich	99 FS	1 ME-109	2292 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	2 Lt Hugh J. White	99 FS	1 ME-109	2292 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	1 Lt Robert W. Williams	100 FS	2 FW-190s	2293 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	2 Lt Bertram W. Wilson Jr.	100 FS	1 FW-190	2293 XV AF 12 Apr 45
1 Apr 1945	2 Lt Carl E. Carey	301 FS	2 FW-190s	2294 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	2 Lt John E. Edwards	301 FS	2 ME-109s	2294 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	FO James H. Fischer	301 FS	1 FW-190	2294 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	2 Lt Walter P. Manning	301 FS	1 FW-190	2294 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	2 Lt Harold M. Morris	301 FS	1 FW-190	2294 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	1 Lt Harry T. Stewart	301 FS	3 FW-190s	2294 XV AF 12 Apr 45
	1 Lt Charles L. White	301 FS	2 ME-109s	2294 XV AF 12 Apr 45
15 Apr 1945	1 Lt Jimmy Lanham	301 FS	1 ME-109	3484 XV AF 29 May 45

26 Apr 1945	2 Lt Thomas W. Jefferson	301 FS	2 ME-109s	3362 XV AF 23 May 45
	1 Lt Jimmy Lanham	301 FS	1 ME-109	3362 XV AF 23 May 45
	2 Lt Richard A. Simons	100 FS	1 ME-109	2990 XV AF 4 May 45

*order says credit was 16 Jul 1944, but history says 18 Jul 1944

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- ¹ Twelfth Air Force General Orders 66, 81, and 122, dated 24 May, 22 Jun, and 7 Aug, 1944, respectively; Lynn M. Homan and Thomas Reilly, *Black Knights* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2006), pp. 106-109; Chris Bucholtz, *332d Fighter Group-Tuskegee Airmen* (Oxford, UK: Osprey, 2007), pp. 29-32.
- ² Twelfth Air Force General Order 66 dated 24 May 1944; Twelfth Air Force General Order 81 dated 22 Jun 1944; Twelfth Air Force General Order 122 dated 7 Aug 1944; Lynn M. Homan and Thomas Reilly, *Black Knights* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2006), pp. 106-109; Chris Bucholtz, *332d Fighter Group-Tuskegee Airmen* (Oxford, UK: Osprey, 2007), pp. 29-32 .
- ³ 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report Number 3 dated 9 June 1944.
- ⁴ Fifteenth Air Force General Order 1473 dated 30 June 1944.
- ⁵ 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report Number 3 dated 9 June 1944; Fifteenth Air Force General Order 1473 dated 30 Jun 1944; 332 Fighter Group history June 1944; Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., *Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., American* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 122-123; Missing Air Crew Reports numbered 6317 and 6179; Fifteenth Air Force General Order number 2972 dated 31 Aug 1944, which awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross to then Col Benjamin O. Davis, Jr..
- ⁶ 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report Number 23 dated 12 July 1944; 332d Fighter Group history, July 1944.
- ⁷ Fifteenth Air Force General Orders 2032 and 2466 dated 23 July and August 1944, respectively.
- ⁸ 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report Number 23 dated 12 July 1944 and supplement to that report; 332 Fighter Group history, Jul 1944; 461st Bombardment Group mission report for 12 Jul 1944; Fifteenth Air Force mission folder for 12 Jul 1944; Missing Air Crew Reports 6808, 6894, 6895, and 7034.
- ⁹ 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report number 28 dated 18 July 1944; 332d Fighter Group history, July 1944.
- ¹⁰ 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report number 28 dated 18 July 1944; Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2350 dated 6 Aug 1944; Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2484 dated 11 Aug 1944; Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2202 dated 31 Jul 1944; 332d Fighter Group History, July 1944; 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report 28 dated 18 Jul 1944; Fifteenth Air Force Mission Folder for 18 Jul 1944; Missing Air Crew Report numbers 6856, 6953, 6954, 6975, 6976, 6977, 6978, 6979, 6980, 6981, 7097, 7098, 7099, 7153, and 7310.
- ¹¹ 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report number 30 dated 20 July 1944
- ¹² 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report number 30 dated 20 Jul 1944; Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2202 dated 31 Jul 1944; Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2284 dated 3 Aug 1944; Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2484 dated 11 Aug 1944; 332d Fighter Group history for July 1944; Missing Air Crew Reports numbered 6914 and 6919.
- ¹³ 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report number 37 dated 26 July 1944; 332d Fighter Group History, July 1944.
- ¹⁴ Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2350 dated 6 Aug 1944; Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2484 dated 11 Aug 1944; 332d Fighter Group history for July 1944; 332d Fighter Group Mission Report 37 dated 26 Jul 1944.
- ¹⁵ 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report 38 dated 27 July 1944.
- ¹⁶ 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report 38 dated 27 July 1944; Fifteenth Air Force General Orders 2284, 2350, and 2485, dated 3 Aug, 6 Aug, and 11 Aug, 1944, respectively.
- ¹⁷ Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2284 dated 3 Aug 1944; Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2350 dated 6 Aug 1944; Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2484 dated 11 Aug 1944; Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2485 dated 11 Aug 1944; 332d Fighter Group history for July 1944; 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report 38 dated 27 Jul 1944.
- ¹⁸ 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission report 92 dated 12 Oct 1944.
- ¹⁹ Fifteenth Air Force General Order 4287 dated 1 Nov 1944; Fifteenth Air Force General Order 4604 dated 21 Nov 1944; 332 Fighter Group history for Oct 1944; 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report 92 dated 12 Oct 1944, and supplement to that report; Davis autobiography, 130.
- ²⁰ 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report 246 dated 24 Mar 1945; 332d Fighter Group history, March 1945.
- ²¹ 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report 246 dated 24 Mar 1945; Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2293 dated 12 Apr 1945.

²² Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2293 dated 12 Apr 1945; 332 Fighter Group history for Mar 1945; 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report 246 dated 24 Mar 1945; Fifteenth Air Force mission folder for 24 Mar 1945; Mission reports of the 2d, 463d and 483d Bombardment Groups for 24 Mar 1945; Missing Air Crew Reports 13266-13270, 13278, 13274, 13375, 13374, and 13271.

²³ Fifteenth Air Force General Orders 2292 and 2293, dated 12 Apr 1945; 332d Fighter Group history for Mar 1945; 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report 252 dated 31 Mar 1945.

²⁴ Fifteenth Air Force General Orders 2292 and 2293, dated 12 Apr 1945; 332d Fighter Group history for Mar 1945; 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report 252 dated 31 Mar 1945; Davis autobiography, 133-134.

²⁵ 332d Fighter Group history for Mar 1945; 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report 252 dated 31 Mar 1945.

²⁶ Fifteenth Air Force Mission Report 253 dated 12 Apr 1945.

²⁷ Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2294 dated 12 Apr 1945; 332d Fighter Group history for Apr 1945; 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report 253 dated 1 Apr 1945; Davis autobiography, 134.

²⁸ Fifteenth Air Force General Order 2990 dated 4 May 1945; Fifteenth Air Force General Order 3362 dated 23 May 1945; 332d Fighter Group history for Apr 1945; 332d Fighter Group Narrative Mission Report 309 dated 26 Apr 1945; Davis autobiography, 135.