

Have you ever heard the story from World War II history of two very crucial groups? Well, I'm here to salute the 332nd fighter group (Tuskegee Airmen) and the Women Air Service Pilots (WASP). First of all, they were pioneers in aviation; fighting for their rights and against hate. Secondly, they used that hate to motivate themselves to fight to fly and win; so please join the journey while I talk about them.

The Tuskegee Airmen were the first and only African American fighter group to fly for the United States Air Force. It was 1941 and the African Americans were very mad at the Air Force for not letting them fly and fight; but finally, on March 22nd, Franklin Delano Roosevelt made the first all black fighter group. The 332nd Fighter group originally consisted of four squadrons: the 100th Fighter Squadron, the 301st Fighter Squadron, and the 302nd Fighter Squadron. The Tuskegee Airmen were credited by higher commands with the following accomplishments: 1378 combat missions: 1067 for the Twelfth Air Force, and 311 for the Fifteenth Air Force; and 179 bomber escort missions, with a good record of protection; losing only 25 bombers. This proves that the Tuskegee Airmen had to aim high, never quit, and be ready to Fly, Fight, and Win.

Many Tuskegee Airmen were training in Michigan at one point, which is my home state. Sadly, not all of the men made it back when they did training at Selfridge Air Force Base (now Selfridge Air National Guard Base). They flew P-40 Warhawks and P-39 Airacobras. 15 pilots died in training.¹ Interesting fact: Selfridge ANGB was named after the first airplane crash fatality when Thomas E Selfridge was flying over where the base is located with Orville Wright and crashed. Thomas died, but Orville survived with injuries. Thanks to Selfridge Air National Guard Base Museum for making me aware of those facts. Back to what I was saying, one of the P-39s crashed in Lake St. Clair but the parts were able to be recovered.

This whole paragraph is dedicated to LT.COL. USAF, RETIRED Alexander Jefferson and some of it is dedicated to his book "Red Tail Captured, Red Tail Free". Part of the book talks about when the biggest and maximum security POW camp he was in was liberated. A while after, General Patton came there with his tank division and when inspecting the liberated camp, "some of us accompanied Patton on a tour of

¹ <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/education/teachers/red-tails-blue-water-the-tuskegee-airmen-project.html#>

the camp. He entered one of the filthy barracks and asked whether it was for NCOS. When we told him, no, that these were officer's quarters, he nearly had a hemorrhage.

No mattresses, and three blankets and one water pump for 300 men! He ordered food to be immediately brought in from Moosburg. A U.S. Army food kitchen arrived the next day.”²

Something else I want to mention is the movie “Red Tails”- the scene where the squadron receives P-51D aircraft is historically accurate because before they had a forward air cover mission, before they became the 332nd Fighter group, they were the 99th Pursuit Squadron. They would do bombing missions and spy, but no forward air cover missions. In 1941 that all changed; they got the go ahead for a forward air cover mission flying with B-17s as an escort. They did cover for an invasion but they stayed with the bomber aircraft. The old strategy for escorting bombers was to go after any enemies that were near the bombers and try to kill the enemy aircraft but that left the bombers unprotected, meaning a second wave of enemy fighters could attack the bomber formation. The Tuskegee Airmen changed that strategy by staying with the bomber aircraft and stayed with them even while under attack. They would wait for a single enemy aircraft to fire shots at the bomber and then wait until they came back and were facing the Tuskegee aircraft, then they would fire at them. They stayed with the bombers to provide the better protection that was needed, and this forever changed the way the military did escorts.³

The Tuskegee Airmen didn't just have to fight for rights to be in the Air Force, but they also got told bad things like racial slurs that are horrible. They eventually stopped fighting with those mean people and focused on their jobs. They flew and they had the last laugh because they were actually doing better than the other pilots because they expected to win and knew they had done the right things. They aimed high to Fly, Fight and Win.

Though the Tuskegee Airmen were pioneers in military aviation, they weren't the only ones, because you cannot forget about the Women Air Service Pilots (WASPS). They weren't the first women to fly, but they were the first women to fly for the United

² Red Tail Captured, Red Tail Free: Memoirs of a Tuskegee Airman and POW, Revised Edition, Alexander Jefferson and Lewis H. Carlson, 2017, Fordham University Press

³ Red Tails, 2012, LucasFilms

States Air Force. According to Texas Woman's University, "In 1942, Nancy Harkness Love created the Women Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) and Jacqueline Cochran

the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD). The WASP formed in August 1943 when the WAFS and WFTD programs merged".⁴ The WASPS had to fight through hate from people insulting them, thinking that women couldn't fly and they should just stay home and be housewives. The WASPs proved those people wrong, but they didn't do it easily. Just like you can't get your driver's license unless you work hard for it, the WASPS had to use their brains, skill, and aim high to Fly, Fight and Win. "WASPs flew at 126 bases across the US, where they also towed targets for gunnery training and served as instrument instructors for the Eastern Flying Training Command (EFTC). 38 of these women died doing their job; 11 in training and 27 during missions. Between 1942 and 1944, more than 25,000 women applied to become a WASP, but only around 1,100 completed training and earned their silver pilot's wings."⁵

The same thing happened to both the Tuskegee Airmen and the WASPs; they were told they cannot fly or they are bad for thinking they could, which is not right. They worked twice as hard to prove they had the right to be there. They were eventually treated better once they did fly - as bomber squadrons and other people realized everyone has potential and deserves a chance. That's why in the Air Force, it doesn't matter what race, gender, or culture you are; everyone has the opportunity to work hard and fly high.

Thank you for listening. I hope that someday, I will be able to Fly, Fight, and Win, like the Tuskegee Airmen and the WASPs did.

⁴ Texas Woman's University, twu.edu/library/womans-collection/collections/women-airforce-service-pilots-official-archive/history/

⁵ <https://www.afhistory.af.mil/FAQs/Fact-Sheets/Article/458964/womens-airforce-service-pilots-wasp/#>