



CAF RISE ABOVE®

Inspiring young people to RISE ABOVE adversity using the lessons and stories of the Tuskegee Airmen and the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP).

March 2024



Why?

I do not come from an aviation family. For those Squadron and CAF supporters who do, my love for - arguably addiction to - all things aircraft, from the first scale F4F Wildcat model I (clumsily) assembled as a pre-teen, would not have seemed remarkable, nor required explanation; but supporters reading this newsletter without that familial legacy probably have to do some of the same kinds of explaining I always have.

What is the allure of eighty-plus-year-old technology? Who are the generation of soldiers who fought, sacrificed and died in this new and sometimes horrifying arena of air combat, to you? *Why* the CAF, the Rise Above Squadron and ten months or more on the road, away from the very family asking, to see their story continues to be told in a real and tangible way?

(perhaps not the full ten-month monte in your cases as Squadron volunteers specifically, but the question nevertheless applies in principle...)

I believe the answers are in the questions. For most of us, it is a different level of thrill, to step from seeing an historic aircraft static in a museum, to seeing, and hearing, and feeling such an aircraft operational, in its natural environment of the sky - a stirring deep down in the core of our being. I have seen time and again the effect on visitors of hearing our P-51C's engine on start, or passing overhead at speed, to doubt the value of that difference in experience. It matters. I have had too many conversations, occasionally frank ones, with exhibit visitors about who the Tuskegee Airmen and the Women Airforce Service Pilots were, and what their respective and complementary places in the history of our country are, to doubt the value of continuing to share their stories. They matter.

And if the aircraft and the people who built and serviced and rode them into history still matter, are still relevant... then the 'why' of what we as CAF members and Rise Above supporters is an easy answer, to friends and family as well as clients of and guests to the exhibit.

I hope every one of you feels an attachment to the telling of that history - and takes advantage of the opportunity to exercise that love of all things aviation by coordinating with the Squadron to come out to the exhibit when it nears you, or even better to join us in telling the story directly, as an in-person volunteer.

And bring your families: if they haven't completely 'gotten' why you do this, there is every likelihood they won't ever again need to ask, once they've seen you sharing that passion with others.

Respectfully,
Chris Allen
CAF Rise Above Road Exhibit Director

Triumphed in the Sky and Over the Color Barrier

Xavier Richardson

8th Grade

I will never forget a Sunny Sunday afternoon in October, 2023. A P-51C Mustang plane landed at Quincy, Illinois, my hometown. It wasn't just an ordinary plane. It was one of the Tuskegee Airmen's signature aircraft used in their many successful missions in Europe during WWII. This time, the flight was on a different mission—namely, to keep the legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen alive.

As an eighth grader in Quincy Junior High, the focus of our history class this semester has been modern American history which includes WWII. My firsthand encounter with the P-51 Mustang created a personal connection to these heroes of the sky. Since then, I've learned that Col. George Illes, one of the Tuskegee Airmen, was born and raised in Quincy. An elementary school was named after him. When I touched the Mustang, and looked up into blue sky, I whispered a thank you. I hope that all of us will always remember the brave Tuskegee Airmen who risked their lives to defend this country.

Before 1940, African Americans were denied opportunities to become pilots in the U.S. military because of discrimination and prejudice. Some high-ranking officials at that time believed blacks were inferior to whites and didn't belong in aircraft. Many wanted to see them fail. But they didn't give up. The Tuskegee Airmen aimed high, used their brains to succeed, and as a result became the first black military pilots in U.S. history. After making it through training, they were ready to go and expected to win. They flew 1,578 combat missions and 179 bomber escort runs. They earned Three Distinguished Unit Citations, a Silver Star, 14 Bronze Stars, 744 Air Medals and 8 purple hearts. The Tuskegee Airmen rank among America's greatest heroes.

That sunny afternoon was a pivotal point in my life. I took the Tuskegee Airmen's bravery, determination, and perseverance to heart. It reminds me of the possibilities of what a person can do with their life if they aim high!



How the WASP's Six Principles Influenced Me

Vy K. Thai
11th Grade

I was first introduced to the WASP's my second year in AFJROTC. Our squadrons were named in honor of two WASP's: the Harkness Squadron, named after the WASP's organizer, and the Gillies Squadron, named after Betty Gilles, the first female pilot to qualify. The Women Airforce Service Pilots were the first female aviators in US military history. Women like Nancy Harkness Love and Jackie Cochran petitioned tirelessly to get the military to allow women an opportunity to fly planes.

When the opportunity came after the Pearl Harbor attack, over 25,000 women stepped up for the opportunity to fly. 1,074 of these women would go on to earn their silver wings, solidifying their status as WASP's. The WASP's flew over 80 different aircraft types, including bombers, transports and trainers, ferried over 12,650 aircrafts, and flew over 60 million miles. Their notable contributions would aid in military missions and allow more male pilots to be deployed to the front lines. (CAF WASPs History)

Despite their gender, the WASP's pushed to become aviators even when they were told they couldn't. Their dedication and resilience proved that women too, can break boundaries and succeed. The successes of the WASP's were heavily impacted by their six guiding principles: Aim High, Believe in Yourself, Use your Brain, Be Ready to Go, Never Quit and Expect to Win. Inspired by their successes, I want to apply these principles towards my goals.

For me, I want to do something meaningful, something I can look back on with pride. Serving others is the best way that one can live their life, by impacting someone or something important. That's why I want to AIM HIGH and serve in the Marine Corps. However, as an Asian female, I'm expected to study hard and marry a wealthy man. The military was meant for men, not women. By choosing to defy tradition, I've received backlash from people around me. I was told I'd suffer and die at war, that I'd be a "pee on", and that I would get raped.

Despite the discouragement, I will persist, BELIEVING IN MYSELF and my dreams. I will strive to increase my PFT scores. Currently, I've maxed out pull-ups and planks for women, but still need to work on improving my run time. I'm also working towards gaining weight (7 more pounds!).



Montgomery Regional Airport Montgomery AL

Percy Julian High School JROTC joins the Rise Above exhibit at Alabama Air National Guard base Montgomery!

Montgomery F-35 unveiling ceremony.
Photo courtesy Scott Slocum



Scott Slocum



FEATURED TUSKEGEE AIRMEN PROFILE

America's Tribute to the Tuskegee Airmen

MSgt Judge Albert Jr.

July 22, 1927 – March 20, 2015

When Judge Albert Jr. joined the United States Army Air Corps in 1945, it was a wake-up call to how widespread segregation was.

“We had German POWs running around the base,” he said. “Those guys could go to the BX (base exchange) and ride in the bus and go to any restaurant. This was when I first noticed the difference, and it escalated from there until it changed when President Harry Truman desegregated (the armed forces) in 1948.”

Albert became a part of the Tuskegee Airmen when he was assigned to the 332nd Fighter Group under Benjamin O. Davis in 1946. At the time, he was in maintenance and supply roles.

“I knew several of the pilots, and they were fun to work with,” he said. “They’re funny, and they take chances and do the things pilots do.”

He recalls going to the mess hall one day and seeing the mess officer wearing pilot’s wings.

“I said, ‘Sir, are you a pilot?’ and he said yes and I said, ‘What are you doing being a mess officer?’”

It turned out that the pilot had been proud of making a perfect three-point landing, but then he taxied into the general’s airplane, and he was grounded.

Albert, who had been drafted in 1945, said he’d never planned on making a career in the armed forces, but he spent 30 years in the service, retiring as a master sergeant.

During the latter half of the 1940s, Albert served in a military police unit in Japan.

“We were the first unit to desegregate over there,” he said. “Our commander said, ‘You guys work together and protect each other.’ We were forcing it to happen, and we all stayed in the same barracks.”

He added that black soldiers’ history goes beyond one unit in one war. “The role of the blacks in history goes all the way back through all the wars,” he said. “You name them, and we were a part of them. That should be taught.”

[**Read his profile online!**](#)



Learn more about the [**CAF Red Tail Squadron**](#), whose mission is sharing the inspiring legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen, America’s first black military pilots and their support personnel. Their strength, courage, and ability to triumph over adversity during WWII can serve to inspire others about how to succeed today.

“You can be anything you set your mind to. The only true obstacle is you.”
~ Tuskegee Airman Major Joseph Gomer



For every pilot there were 10 men on the ground keeping him in the air. Here 332nd FG mechanics work on a Mustang. Left to right: S/Sgt. Calvin P. Thierry New York City, prop specialist; S/Sgt. William E. Pitts, Los Angeles, engine specialist; Vernon C. Richardson New York City, engine specialist; and S/Sgt. Harold T. Cobb Atlantic Highlands, NJ, Crew Chief.

Lt. Andrew D. Marshall, pilot in the 332nd Fighter Group of the Mediterranean Allied Air force had his plane shot up by flak during a strafing mission over Greece before the Allied invasion. When he came down all that was left of the plane was his engine and himself. But he only suffered some bruises and cuts. Greeks hid him from the Nazis, then directed him to the British forces when they parachuted into Greece.

From the Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis (USAF. Ret) collection, Moton Field, Tuskegee, Alabama.





Honoring the Women Airforce Service Pilots

FEATURED WASP PROFILE

Edna B. Harrison Atkins

Class 44-W-6

March 20, 1912 - Feb. 2, 2009

Planes flown: PT-17, BT-13, AT-6, B-17, B-24

Training Location: Avenger Field (Sweetwater, Tex)

Assigned Bases: Shaw Army Air Base (Sumpter, S.C.) and Buckingham Army Air Field (Fort Myers, Fla.)

Edna B. Harrison Atkins was born March 20, 1912 in New Windsor, New York.

Her first flight was "more or less on a dare" with her husband, Joe Harrison. She and Joe met near Newburgh, New York and traveled all over the United States, working at approximately 20 major newspapers.

After soloing and receiving her private pilot license, Edna applied for and was accepted into the Army Airforces Flight Training program at Avenger Field, Sweetwater, Texas. She entered the WASP as a member of class 44-6, and graduated in the summer of 1944. She was stationed at Buckingham Army Air Base, Fort Myers, Florida, where she flew the B-26 Martin Marauder (twin engine bomber) as a tow target pilot until the WASP were disbanded in December of 1944.

After deactivation, she returned to the printing trade as a line type operator, continuing flying on the side until 1952. Her husband, Joe, died in 1954.

Edna remarried in July 1964 to Ewing M. Atkins of Rossville, Georgia. She and her new husband moved to St. Cloud, Florida in 1988. Ewing died in November of 1996.

[***Read her profile online!***](#)



Learn more about the [**RISE ABOVE: WASP**](#), whose mission is sharing the story of the Women Airforce Service Pilots in order to inspire others, especially girls and young women, to RISE ABOVE expectations and find a greater appreciation of their potential.

WASP QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“I often wondered how we could have managed to log 60 million air miles if all we ever did was ‘flirt’ with the boys.”

WASP Susie Winston Bain, Class W-44-4



Women pilot trainees in class at Avenger Field in Sweetwater Texas - 1943.

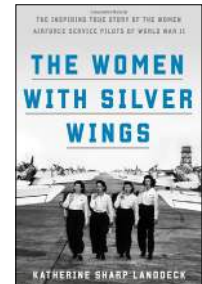
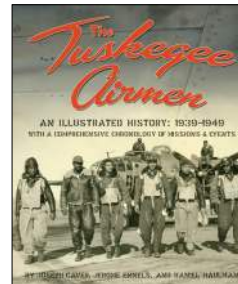
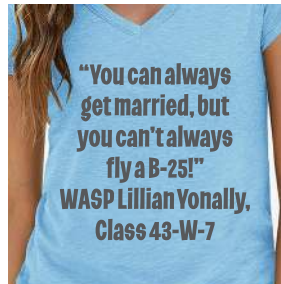
LIFE Magazine - Peter Stackpole Photographer



Solo flight for a WASP Trainee at Avenger Field in Sweetwater Texas - 1943.

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Why 99? (for each annual membership)

[Join RISE ABOVE: RED TAIL](#)

The 99th was originally formed as the U.S. Army Air Forces' first African American fighter squadron, then known as the 99th Pursuit Squadron. The personnel received their initial flight training at Tuskegee, Alabama earning them the nickname Tuskegee Airmen.

[Join RISE ABOVE: WASP](#)

The Ninety-Nines was founded November 2, 1929, at Curtiss Field, Valley Stream, Long Island, New York. All 117 women pilots at the time were invited to assemble in mutual support of the advancement of women in aviation. In 1942 members of the Ninety-Nines were asked to join the Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASP) class of 43-W-1 in Houston, Texas.



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We are looking for exceptional volunteers to become CAF Rise Above Ambassadors!
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Be A Hometown Hero – Bring The RISE ABOVE Traveling Exhibit To Your Community!

The CAF RISE ABOVE Traveling Exhibit could be available to make a stop in your hometown. Imagine the draw an exhibit like this would be at your airshow, community event or festival!

Contact Keri Ryan, CAF Rise Above Squadron Logistics Coordinator, at (802) 371-8838 or logistics@cafriseabove.org for more information.



Please mail correspondence or donations to our home office at:

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Find an archive of all our best articles, featuring closer looks at original Tuskegee Airmen, the P-51C Mustang *Tuskegee Airmen*, and many more in-depth stories in our blog. [Check it out!](#)



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