

Equality in the Air ~ Tuskegee Airmen

In 1940, the United States was a segregated country where black and white people lived and used separate facilities. Many people did not think African Americans could be pilots, but the United States needed many pilots. To help satisfy the demands for pilots, African Americans were trained as fighter pilots in a separate facility in Tuskegee, Alabama. Once the cadets passed training they were assigned to the 332nd fighter group of the 15th Air Force and became the first African American Aviation unit. They served with honors and distinction and proved that given the equal chance, they could fly and defend their country as well as a white pilot. Their service led to the eventual integration of the U.S. Armed Forces in 1948.

Several cadets who learned how to fly at the Douglas 63rd Detachment later became instructors in Tuskegee.



Lt. Richard Kane
Class 1943-H



Lt. Ben McWilliams
Class 1943-I



Capt. Owen Petterson
Class 1943-D

How were the Tuskegee Cadets the same as the Douglas Cadets?

Both trained with the PT-17 Stearman bi-plane.

Both received the same type and amount of classroom and flying training.

Many had college educations or achieved high academic standards.

Both achieved the same officer rank of 2nd Lieutenant.

Both served overseas and had successful missions.

Both received honors and medals for their service.



How were the Tuskegee Cadets different from the Douglas Cadets?

All stages of training (Primary, Basic, Advanced) took place in one location for the Tuskegee Airmen while the Douglas cadets went to many locations.

Tuskegee Cadets were the first African Americans trained as military pilots so they had very few experienced African American veterans to serve as role models who could offer advice.

Tuskegee Cadets experienced restrictions based on their race and remained a segregated unit throughout the war. They often faced discrimination both overseas and at home.

"We were told not to fly in their (Tuskegee Airmen) area...but some of us would fly solo over near their area and their cadets would fly close to our area. We would wave to each other and for a few minutes we would fly in formation with each other."

Cadet Ezell Goodwin Jr. Class 1945-A at basic flight training in Montgomery Alabama which was nearby Tuskegee Army Air Field.



Equality in the Air ~ Tuskegee Airmen Activities

1. Circle the activities that the Tuskegee Airmen **were able** to do and **cross out** the activities that they **were not able** to do.

Become pilots

Have a soda in a white officers club

Escort bomber planes

Shoot down enemy planes

Visit white only businesses in town

Earn Distinguished Flying Crosses and other awards

Train with white pilots

Earn rank and military pay

2. On a separate piece of paper, answer ONE of the questions below in paragraph form. Remember to include a main idea, supporting sentences, and a conclusion.
- How do you think the service of the Tuskegee Airmen helped integrate the military?
 - The Tuskegee Airmen joined with other Allies to fight the tyranny of Axis powers for freedom of the United States and other Allied countries. The pilots found that many of the freedoms that they fought for during the war were denied to them. Many parts of the country were still segregated and African Americans were treated differently than white people.
How do you think African Americans' experience in war influenced the Civil Rights movement that followed in the decades after the war?
 - How did the service of the Tuskegee Airmen influence African American civilians who observed the pilots and learned about their service and awards?

3. The poster to the right is an example of a propaganda poster featuring an African American pilot. The purpose of propaganda posters is to present a message and inspire a reaction. This poster encouraged citizens to buy war bonds in order to fund the pilots fighting the war. On a separate piece of paper, create a new propaganda poster that encourages citizens to support the Tuskegee Airmen. Be sure to include a slogan (saying) and a drawing that clearly presents your message.

Need some ideas? Try using one of these slogans...

Tuskegee Army Air Field Needs You!

Join the Red Tails!

We're Flying For Our Freedom!

Don't let us down!

