



Social Studies and Lit with the Tuskegee Airmen Story

Students will learn about the Tuskegee Airmen and how historic figures have advanced the rights of the individual. Special emphasis is placed on having respect for others and on valuing things that make us different.

LESSON PLAN

Learning Objectives

The students will:

- Learn about the Tuskegee Airmen, heroic African American pilots of World War II
- Identify historical figures who believed in fundamental democratic values such as equality, the rights of the individual and responsibility for the common good
- Describe how historic figures have advanced the rights of individuals and promoted the common good
- Identify character traits such as persistence, problem solving and respect for others
- Optional: build a glider and color its tail red to pay tribute to the Tuskegee Airmen

Purpose

During this lesson, students will learn about the Tuskegee Airmen and how historical figures advanced the rights of the individual. Students will learn about diversity, respect for others and valuing things that make us different.

Background

From the infancy of our country, African American men and women have fought and died defending a nation that has often denied them many of the fundamental rights of citizenship. The Tuskegee Airmen were dedicated young men who became America's first group of African American military airmen, at a time when many people thought that African Americans lacked intelligence, courage, skill and patriotism. They came from all parts of the country, with large numbers coming from Los Angeles, Washington, New York City, Detroit, Chicago and Philadelphia. Each and every one of them possessed a burning, personal desire to serve the United States to the best of their abilities. Those who had the physical and mental qualifications were accepted as aviation cadets to be trained as single-engine pilots, and later, to be either twin-engine pilots, navigators or bombardiers. Most were college graduates or undergraduates, and others demonstrated their academic abilities through comprehensive entrance examinations.

Grade Level: 3

[Ohio Learning Standards/Social \(2018\)](#)

[Historical Thinking and Skills](#)

Government/Civic Participation and Skills
[Gov.CP.10:](#) Individuals make the community a better place by taking action for the common good.

Geography/Human Systems
[G.HS.8:](#) Communities may include diverse cultural groups

[Ohio Learning Standards/English Language Arts \(2017\)](#)

[SL.3.1:](#) Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions

[SL.3.2:](#) Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats

Materials Required:

- Book: *The Tuskegee Airmen Story*
- Book: *Wind Flyers*
- Tuskegee Airmen presentation
- Laptop, monitor, digital projector
- Styrofoam egg carton lids
- Egg carton glider paper templates
- Pens
- Red markers
- Student scissors
- Large paper clips
- Hobby knife for prep work (optional)

New recruits trained for nine months at the prestigious Tuskegee Institute in Alabama (designated as Tuskegee Army Air Field or TAAF). The training and classes were very difficult, and no standards or parameters were lowered for any of the recruits.

From 1941 through 1946, nearly 1,000 young men were trained as pilots, and, after successfully completing the training, they received their commissions and silver pilot wings. The Tuskegee Airmen formed the 332nd Fighter Group which originally consisted of four fighter squadrons: the 99th, the 100th, the 301st and the 302nd. They flew over 15,000 missions/sorties in the European Theater of World War II, as well as in the North African and Mediterranean Theaters. For every pilot, there were at least ten African American men and women on the ground in supporting roles, including medical technicians, mechanics, administrative personnel and cooks. White American pilots were not allowed to fly more than 52 missions/sorties, but African American pilots often flew up to 100 missions due to lack of replacements.

Aircraft flown by the Tuskegee Airmen included the P-40 'Warhawk,' the P-47 'Thunderbolt,' the P-39 'Airacobra' and the plane that they are most recognized for flying, the P-51 'Mustang.' In fact, they painted the tails of these planes red, which led them to become known as the "Red Tails." And, since they were not allowed to practice or fight with their white counterparts, this gave them a distinction that made them very, very proud. Their success as B-17 and B-24 bomber escorts was amazing. It has been said that, when enemy fighter pilots saw the red-tailed P-51's, they thought twice about attacking! The Tuskegee Airmen had one of the lowest loss records of all the escort fighter groups, and their services were in high demand by all of the Allied bomber units.

Sixty-six of them died in combat and thirty-three became prisoners of war (POW's). The Tuskegee Airmen fought TWO WARS: one against the enemy and enemy aircraft, and the other against prejudice and racism while serving in the military and when returning home to America. In 1948, President Harry S. Truman enacted Executive Order 9981, which directed equality of treatment and opportunity in all American Armed Forces, and in time, this led to the end of racial segregation in the U. S. military. In 2006, surviving members of the Tuskegee Airmen were invited to the White House and were given special commendations by President Bush. In addition, many of them were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal at a special ceremony in the U. S. Capitol Rotunda.

There were numerous photographs taken of the President saluting individual Tuskegee Airmen—symbolizing all the salutes they never got when they were commissioned officers and pilots serving their country!

Procedures:

- Items to be covered/discussed/reviewed in class, include: history of Tuskegee Airmen, slide presentation, the books *Wind Flyers* and *The Tuskegee Airmen Story*, diversity and valuing our differences, and optional student glider building and flying.
- Hook: safely fly your own balsa wood glider with the red tail (which you have added using a red magic marker).
- Ask the students why they think the glider has a red tail. Tell them that you will discuss the importance of the red tail later in the lesson.
- Ask the students to think about someone related to them who is an adult: an aunt, an uncle, grandparents, parents, etc.
- Take out the book *The Tuskegee Airmen Story* and tell them that the pages you are about to read relate to a grandfather answering his grandchildren's questions. (See **Resources** for book information).
- Read pages 8—13 to the students, showing them the illustrations on each page.

- Describe and discuss the Tuskegee Airmen briefly; use the attached slides of their training
- Show the students the slides of the World War II aircraft that the Tuskegee Airmen flew and the aircraft that they protected (contained on the same slide presentation).
- Show the class the slides of honors given to the Tuskegee Airmen, including the Congressional Gold Medal, the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II Memorial and their visit to Washington, D.C. to meet with President Bush.
- Read *Wind Flyers*, showing the students the illustrations.
- Choose your own historical figures to discuss, or use the four that are highlighted in Figure 1. Discuss how each historical figure has advanced the rights of individuals and promoted the common good. Speak about character traits such as persistence, problem solving and respect for others.
- Tell the students to remember that each and every one of them is important. We are all special, and we should VALUE what makes us different. Otherwise, it would be a pretty boring world—if we were all the same.
- Optional activity: Build a glider, using an empty egg carton (instructions attached)
 - Use ‘materials required’ reference box on the first page of this lesson plan as a checklist and pass out egg carton glider materials to all students.
 - For younger students, you may wish to trace around the template and pre-cut the glider shape with a hobby knife so that the leading and trailing edges are smoother for better flights.
 - Carefully show the class each step in the glider-building process (use the attached photos of the glider to guide you in the building process – trace the pattern on the inside of the lid of an empty egg carton – the tips of the wing should go up the sides of the carton to create little “winglets”).
 - In addition to the attached instructions, have the students fashion a small tail from leftover egg carton material that can be attached to the aft section of the glider in a vertical orientation, perpendicular to the plane. Have the students first color the tail with a red marker and then attach the tail with tape (or cut a slit in the back of the glider and slide the tail in place).
 - Have the students put their name on their glider.
 - Fly the gliders in a gymnasium or other large area, making sure that students fly their gliders in an orderly fashion in the same direction at the same time (if the room permits a single line).

Assessment/Evaluation

The students should be evaluated on their overall class participation, listening skills and their ability to follow verbal instructions (especially when they are constructing their gliders). You may also wish to lead a discussion about what was taught during the lesson, emphasizing specific, positive points regarding the Tuskegee Airmen and the example they set for all of us.

Extension

Have the students interview an adult at home. Ask the class to discover what stories their parents, grandparents or aunts/uncles have to offer and to be prepared to share at least one story in class within a few days.

Resources:

Children's Literature:

The Tuskegee Airmen Story by Lynn M. Homan/Thomas Reilly; Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Co., Inc.; 2002c.

Wind Flyers by Angela Johnson; New York: Simon & Schuster Books; 2007

Online resources:

<https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/tuskegee-airmen>

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/brigadier-general-charles-mcgee>

<https://www.history.com/topics/exploration/amelia-earhart>

<https://www.nasa.gov/content/katherine-johnson-biography>

<https://www.history.com/topics/space-exploration/neil-armstrong>

http://www.tuskegeearmen.org/Tuskegee_Airmen_History.html

<https://wrightstories.com/red-tails/>

Historical Figures



GENERAL CHARLES MCGEE



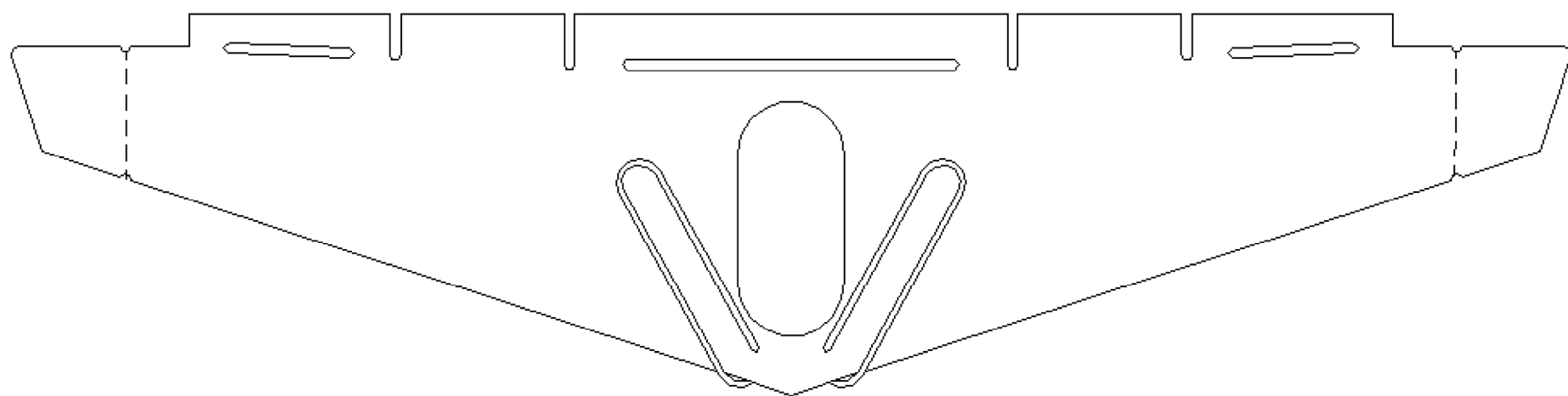
AMELIA MARY EARHART



KATHERINE JOHNSON



NEIL ARMSTRONG







THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN



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Tuskegee Airmen in training



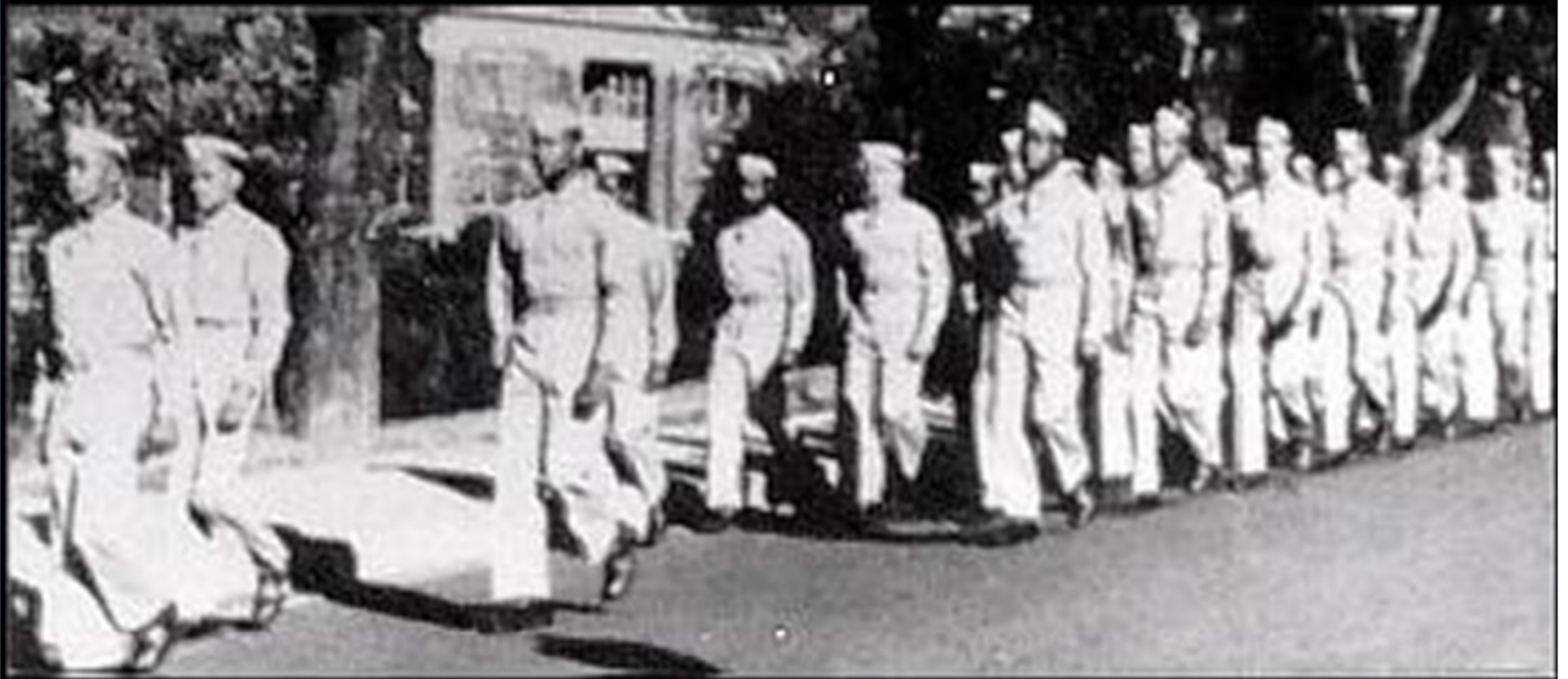
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Tuskegee Airmen in the classroom



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They practiced marching in formation



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They practiced flying BT-13 trainers



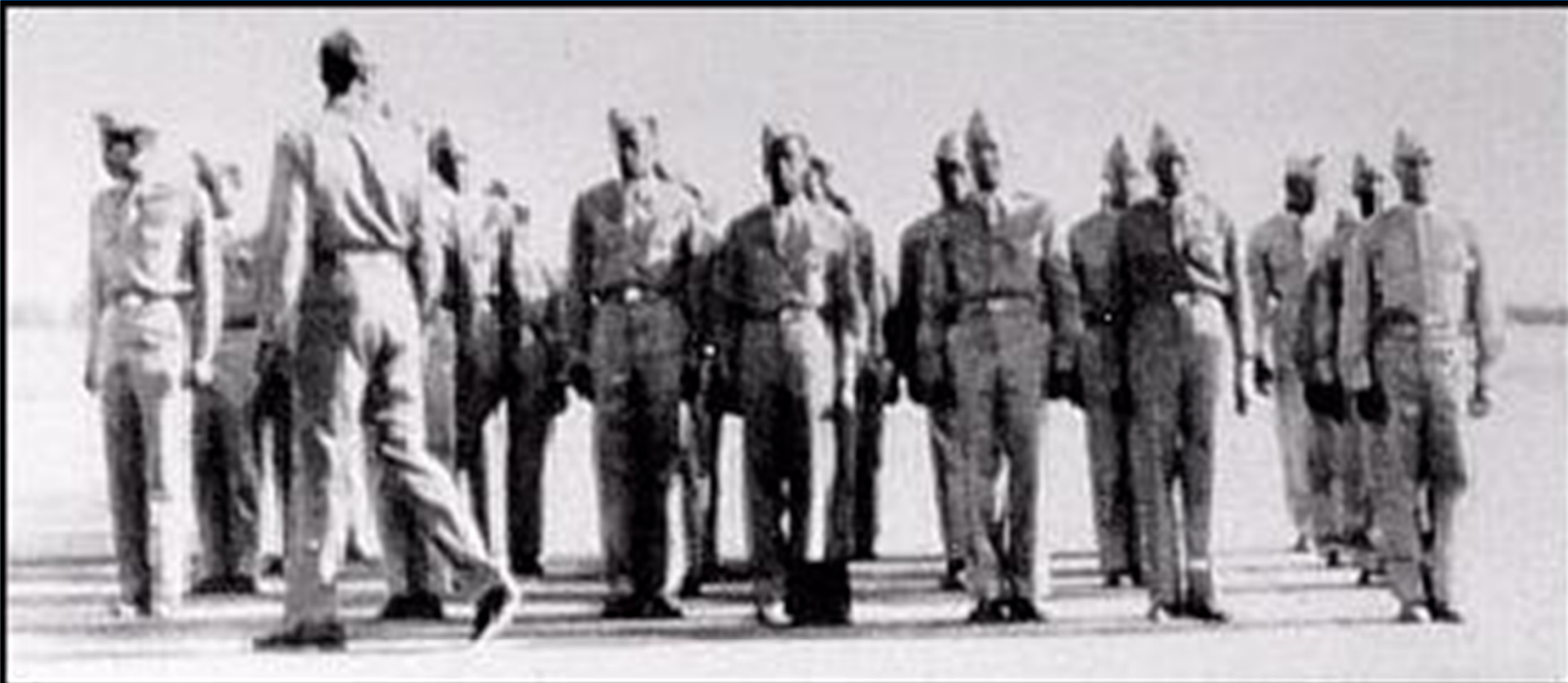
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They were very good students



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Outside for more 'drill and ceremony'



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More flight training



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After nine months—Graduation Day!



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P-51 "Mustang"



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P-51 “Mustangs” in flight



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B-17 “Flying Fortress”



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B-17 “Flying Fortress” in flight



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B-24 “Liberator”



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B-24 “Liberator” in flight



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P-40 “Warhawk” in flight



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P-40 “Warhawk” close-up



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P-47 “Thunderbolt” in flight



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P-39 “Airacobra” in flight



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Artist's painting of Tuskegee Airmen escorting bombers



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Artist's painting of red-tailed P-51 "Mustang"



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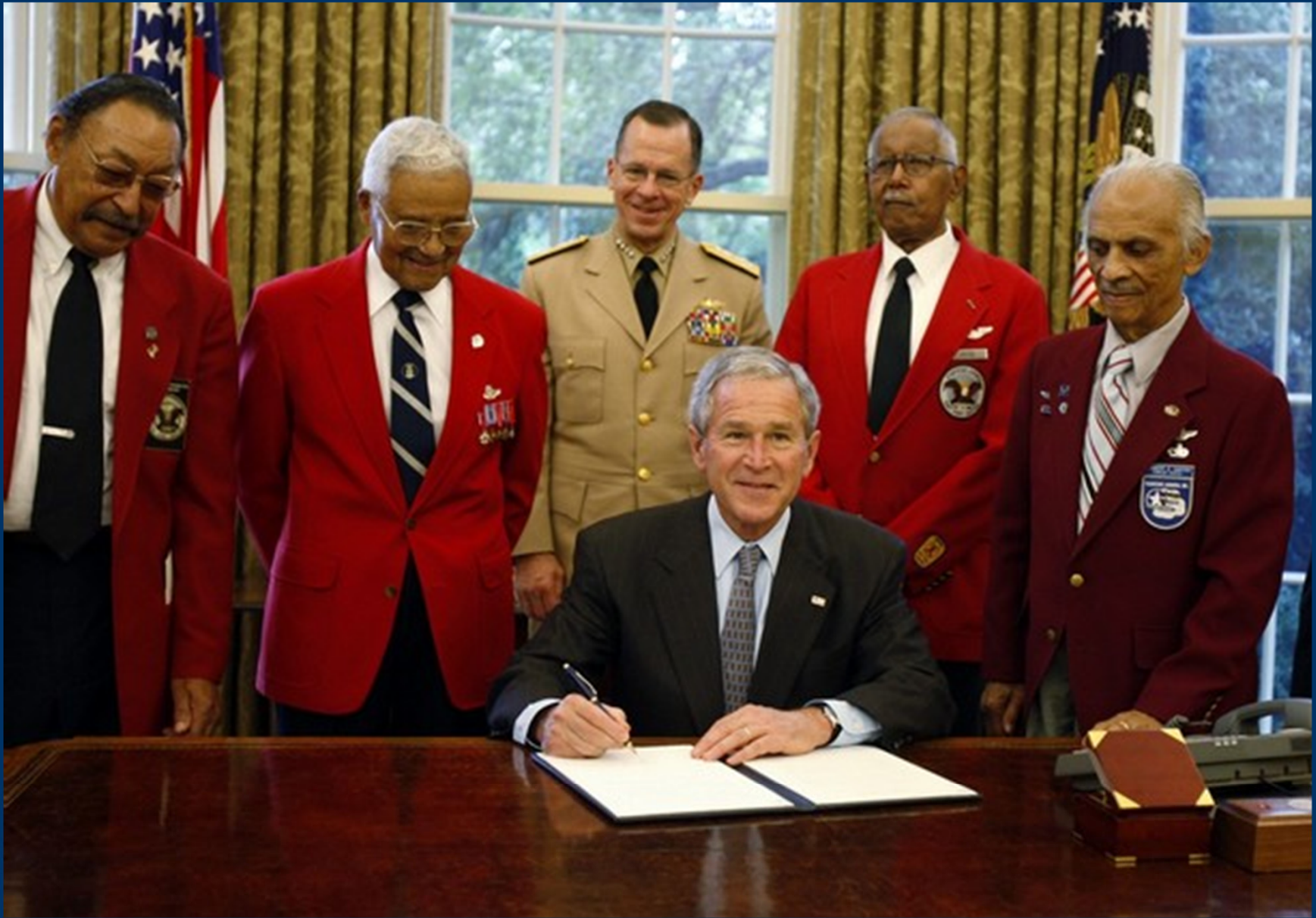
Courtesy: Jerry R. McRae, Tuskegee, Alabama



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THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN



The Tuskegee Airmen were brave African Americans who trained to become commissioned officers and pilots during World War II

Tuskegee Airmen in training



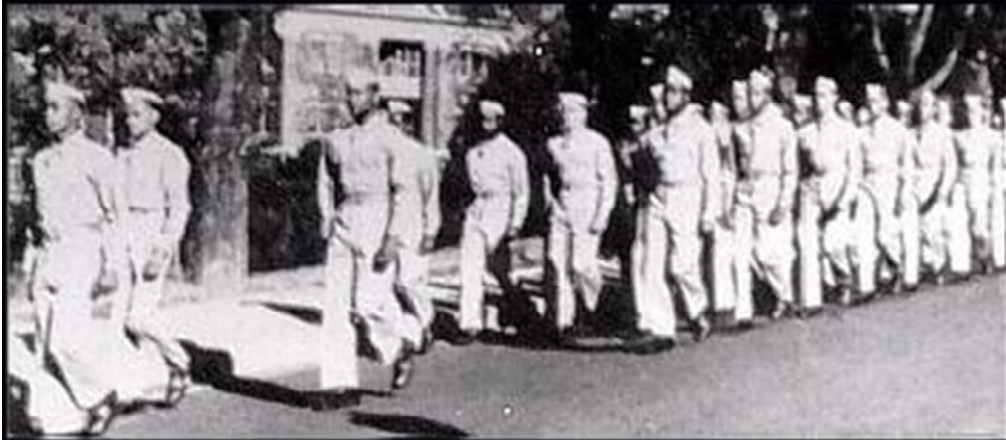
Here we see a large group of Tuskegee Airmen as they trained at the famous Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

Tuskegee Airmen in the classroom



The Tuskegee Airmen trained very hard and had to take many classes involving science, technology, engineering and math.

They practiced marching in formation



The Tuskegee Airmen also trained outside, practicing marching in formation.

They practiced flying BT-13 trainers



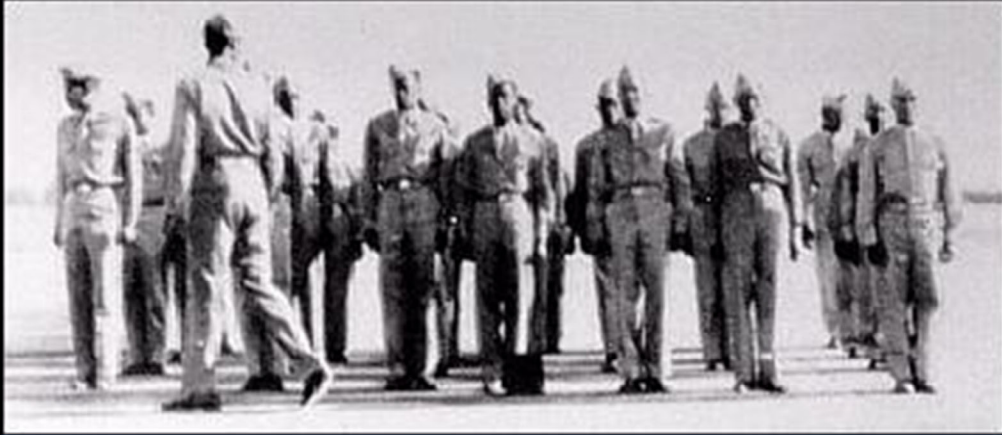
Then they would practice flying BT-13 trainer aircraft!

They were very good students



Next, they would go back into the classroom, receive briefings, etc.

Outside for more 'drill and ceremony'



After a lot of intense classroom work, it probably felt good to exercise outside and to work on their 'drill and ceremony' (marching and formation practice).

More flight training



Then the aviation cadets would practice flying in their trainer airplanes more (notice that trainer aircraft had yellow wings).

After nine months—Graduation Day!



After nine months of very, very difficult training, the Tuskegee Airmen graduated and became commissioned officers and pilots!



Every Tuskegee Airman wanted to serve their country to the best of their abilities.

P-51 “Mustang”



This is the P-51 “Mustang” that is on exhibit at the National Museum of the USAF. The Tuskegee Airmen flew this type of airplane more than any other aircraft. They painted the tails of these planes red, and they became known as the “Red Tails,” a name that made them proud to be Tuskegee Airmen!

P-51 "Mustangs" in flight



Here are P-51 "Mustangs" in flight....

B-17 “Flying Fortress”



This is the B-17 “Flying Fortress” which is on exhibit at the Museum, and it is one of the bombers that the Tuskegee Airmen escorted and protected against enemy aircraft.

B-17 "Flying Fortress" in flight



Here is a B-17 in flight.....

B-24 "Liberator"



This is the B-24 "Liberator" which is on exhibit at the Museum. It is another aircraft that the Tuskegee Airmen escorted and protected.

B-24 "Liberator" in flight



Here is a B-24 in flight...

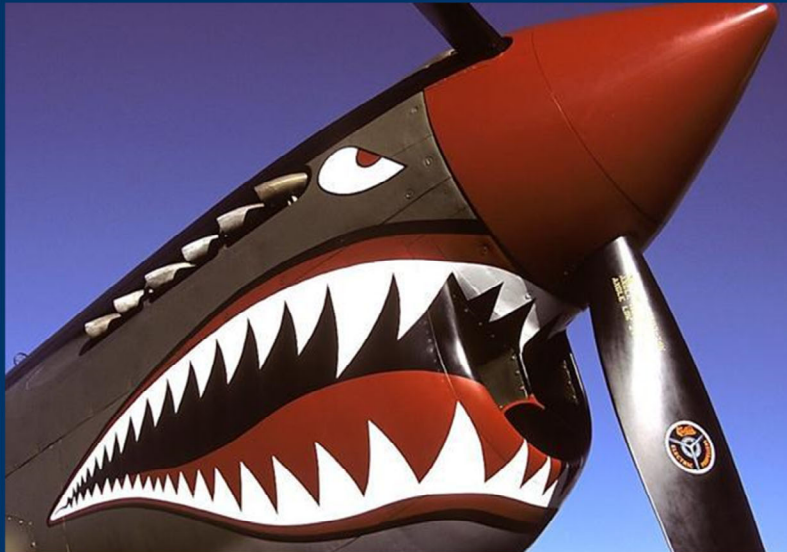
P-40 "Warhawk" in flight



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The Tuskegee Airmen also flew the P-40 "Warhawk."

P-40 "Warhawk" close-up



Here is a close-up of the P-40 ...

P-47 "Thunderbolt" in flight



They also piloted the P-47 "Thunderbolt."

P-39 "Airacobra" in flight



The Tuskegee Airmen also flew the P-39 "Airacobra."

Artist's painting of Tuskegee Airmen escorting bombers



This is a professional artist's rendering of Tuskegee Airmen escorting a number of bomber aircraft, protecting them from enemy airplanes.

Artist's painting of red-tailed P-51 "Mustang"



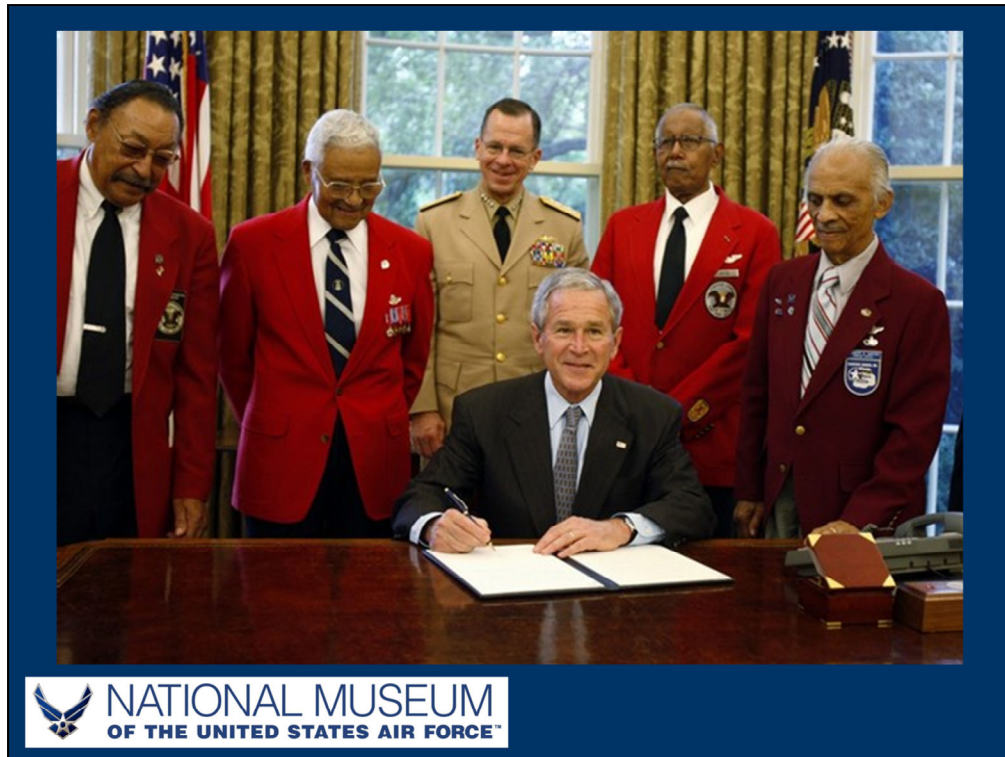
Here is another professional artist's painting of a Tuskegee Airman's P-51 "Mustang," complete with the distinctive red tail.



Here is a memorial honoring the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II.



This is a close-up of the memorial...



This is former President Bush at the White House, signing commendations for members of the Tuskegee Airmen.



Here is President Bush giving some of the Tuskegee Airmen the Congressional Gold Medal for their service to our country. This event took place at the Capitol Rotunda in Washington, D.C.



This is a close-up of the Congressional Gold Medal that members of the Tuskegee Airmen received.



This is President Bush saluting one of the Tuskegee Airmen. This salute symbolizes all the salutes they never got when they were commissioned officers and pilots serving our country!

