

## The Tuskegee Airmen

During World War II, nearly 1,000 Black aviators were trained at an isolated complex called the Tuskegee Institute near the town of Tuskegee, Alabama. The result of the "Tuskegee Experiment" produced 450 Black fighter pilots who operated under the command of Col Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. These pilots fought in the aerial war over North Africa, Sicily and Europe. They flew in succession the P-40, P-39, P-47 and P-51 type aircraft. These gallant men totaled 15,553 sorties completing 1,578 missions with the 12th Tactical Air Force and 15th Strategic Air Force.

The bravery, courage, and skill of the Tuskegee Airmen may best be illustrated by their bomber escort missions. They escorted more than 200 bomber missions and never lost a bomber to an enemy fighter. They were known as the *Schwartzze Vogelmenshen* (Black Birdmen) by the Germans who both feared and respected them. "Bomber crews also called them the "Red Tail Angels" because of the red paint on their aircraft tail assemblies and for their reputation for not losing bombers to enemy fighters while they provided fighter escort over strategic European targets."

They returned home with 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, Bronze Stars, Silver Stars, Legion of Merit, 2 Presidential Unit Citations, and the Red Star of Yugoslavia.

For every pilot there were twelve others, civilian or military men or women on ground support duty. Many of these men and women remained in the military service during the post-World War II era and spearheaded the integration of the armed forces in the United States with their integration into the United States Air Force in 1948.

WE  
"SALUTE YOU!"