

Black History Month

A Florida Focus

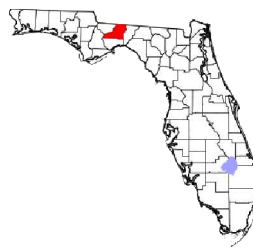
A CIVICS IN REAL LIFE SERIES: CIVICS CONNECTION SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight #17: Tuskegee Airmen

Prior to World War II, the U.S. military was segregated by race. African Americans were also limited in the roles they could fill within the military, often assigned to support positions and completely barred from others, such as flying for the U.S. military. The need for more pilots eventually led to the creation of the [99th Fighter Squadron](#), one of several units that would collectively become the [Tuskegee Airmen](#). The U.S. Army trained African American servicemembers to fly and maintain combat aircraft. Over 1,000 pilots and 14,000 navigators, bombardiers, instructors, mechanics, control tower operators, and other support staff made up the "Tuskegee Experience." Most of the teaching took place at [Tuskegee Institute](#) in Alabama and flight practice was primarily at Moton Field and Tuskegee Army Air Field. However, [Florida](#) played a pivotal role in the training effort as well. Many units trained at Dale Mabry Field near Tallahassee, Florida and Eglin Field in Okaloosa County. Despite being deployed in second-hand planes, the Tuskegee Airmen rose to the challenge. In just two short years, they flew over 1,500 missions, lost fewer bomber planes under their escort than any other unit, and shot down/destroyed hundreds of enemy targets. Together, the Tuskegee Airmen earned 865 Legion of Merit awards, 96 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 1 Silver Star, 14 Bronze Stars, 744 Air Medals and clusters, 8 Purple Hearts, and a [Presidential Citation](#) for the group. Among those men and women were [numerous Floridians](#) from all across the state. Even with numerous accolades, the Tuskegee Airmen still faced harsh discrimination. Despite receiving letters of reprimand or even, at times, being arrested, the Tuskegee Airmen continued to push back against discrimination and segregation. As a result of their efforts, President Truman signed an [executive order](#) in 1948 that desegregated the U.S. military. Today, Florida and a few other states have laws that designate the fourth Thursday in March as Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day in hopes that their commitments, valor, and sacrifices will never be forgotten.

CONNECTION QUESTIONS

- In what ways did the Tuskegee Airmen embody the foundational values of America's constitutional republic?



Lou Frey
Institute