

AIRMAN PROFILE



Lee Archer
Tuskegee Airman

Decorated World War II aviator and “Ace” Lee Andrew Archer Jr., 84, says he dreamed of becoming a fighter pilot at an early age.

The Yonkers, N.Y.-born veteran recalled reading comic books during his boyhood that featured illustrated stories depicting World War I duels in the skies between Germany’s Baron von Richthofen and allied fliers.

The steely-eyed African-American eventually realized his goal: he became a member of the U.S. Army Air Corps’ famed Tuskegee Airmen during World War II. During the 169 combat missions he flew in the European Theater, Archer was credited with downing five enemy aircraft, earning him the coveted title of “Ace.”

The Tuskegee Airmen, he said, flew a variety of combat missions in Europe, totaling 200, and destroyed about 500 enemy aircraft and a destroyer. And the Tuskegee Airmen never lost a bomber to the enemy during allied B-17 and B-24 bomber formation escort duties, Archer noted.

Archer said he was a sophomore at New York University in early 1941 when he decided to enlist in the Army Air Corps to become a pilot. At the time, however, the U.S. military didn’t allow African-Americans to serve as pilots. And although he passed the preliminary pilot’s test with flying colors, Archer was assigned to Camp Wheeler, Ga., as a communications specialist.

RED TAIL PROJECT TO HOST TRIBUTE TO TUSKEGEE AIRMEN JUNE 6

The Red Tail Project cordially invites you to be part of a very special evening of history and fun on June 6, 2007, from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul. The Red Tail Project is dedicated to telling the story of the Tuskegee Airmen. It is restoring a rare World War II P-51C Mustang and developing a traveling museum to help promote understanding of the Airmen’s perseverance against discrimination at home and the Luftwaffe in Europe. As you may know, the Tuskegee Airmen were a World War II fighter group composed of African-American pilots and support personnel who fought discrimination and prejudice in order to serve their country. Their remarkable story of vision, hope, hard work and discipline proved that individuals can accomplish the remarkable, regardless of the obstacles, and remains as relevant today as it did sixty years ago.

The evening will include the opportunity to mingle with Original Tuskegee Airmen, a delicious dinner, private screening of the new PBS documentary “Red Tail Reborn”, and a silent auction. The proceeds from this fund-raising event will go toward the continuing restoration of the Mustang featured in the documentary,

In 1942, the government decided to train a select group of African-American applicants for military flying duty – a decision, Archer noted, that was rumored to have been precipitated by Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of then-President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Archer said he reapplied for pilot’s training and was accepted, earning his wings in 1943.

Yet, before and after they won their wings, Archer said he and the other Tuskegee Airmen had to endure the widespread racism that was prevalent across the U.S. armed forces before President Harry S. Truman’s 1948 order that desegregated America’s military.

Archer said that a mid-1920s U.S. War Department study was responsible for much of the shoddy treatment African-American service members experienced before Truman’s desegregation edict. That study, he pointed out, essentially said African-Americans didn’t have the intelligence or courage necessary for rigorous combat duties – even though U.S. African-American combat troops had fought with documented courage and élan alongside French forces against the Germans during World War I.

So, although Archer was preeminently qualified to be a fighter pilot, his coffee-colored skin at first proved to be a hindrance to his dream.

However, Archer did become an Army Air Corps pilot, and flew P-40 Tomahawk, P-39 Air Cobra, P-47 Thunderbolt, and P-51 Mustang fighters during World War II, earning the rarely awarded Distinguished Flying Cross among numerous other decorations.

The “Tuskegee Experiment,” Archer noted, proved that African-American pilots could fly and fight as well as their white counterparts and played a key role in Truman’s decision to desegregate the U.S. military, which in turn opened up opportunities for all African-Americans.

“This country can be what it is supposed to be, and what it claims to be,” Archer said. “It is in the hands of new troops now, and I want to wish them luck. I personally see the best for them and for their country, which is my country, too,” he concluded.

and the traveling museum and educational programs featuring the Tuskegee Airmen’s accomplishments and history. The Red Tail Project’s program is focused toward youth — specifically, at-risk youth — to inspire them to follow their individual dreams and succeed, just as the Airmen did.

Cost for this historic evening and dinner is \$125 per person. VIP sponsorships* are also available. As a VIP sponsor, you will receive:

1. Full dinner for eight guests (an Original Tuskegee Airman and his guest will also dine at your table!).
2. A stunning hand-carved P-51C Mustang autographed by the attending Airmen.
3. The inspiring biography of Colonel Charles McGee, autographed by the Colonel himself.
4. A half-page ad in the event’s Program Guide.

* The investment for this VIP Sponsorship opportunity is \$5,000.

Tickets may be ordered by calling 877.522.2988 or by going online at www.redtail.org. Please register by May 31, 2007.



Red Tail Project volunteers Brad Lang, Tim Barzen and Doug Rozendaal present Lt. Gen. Russell C. Davis, president of Tuskegee Airmen Inc., with a limited edition print signed by dozens of Tuskegee Airmen.

RED TAIL PROJECT HONORS TUSKEGEE AIRMEN FOLLOWING CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL PRESENTATION

The Red Tail Project presented Tuskegee Airmen Inc. with a very special limited edition print at a reception following the ceremony bestowing the Congressional Gold Medal upon the Airmen.

The print, number one of 250, features the signatures of dozens of surviving Tuskegee Airmen atop an image of Don Hinz taxiing the Red Tail Project's rare P-51C Mustang "Tuskegee Airmen" shortly before Hinz was killed in the crash of the airplane.

Lt. Gen. (Ret) Russell C. Davis accepted the print on behalf of Tuskegee Airmen Inc. in the Library of Congress from Red Tail Project volunteers Brad Lang, Tim Barzen and Doug Rozendaal. The reception followed an emotional ceremony in the Capital rotunda during which the Tuskegee Airmen were awarded the highest civilian honor congress can bestow, the Congressional Gold Medal.

Some 300 pilots and support personnel attended the medal presentation ceremony in Washington DC on March 29.

Speakers paying homage to the airmen included Gen. Colin Powell and President Bush.

"The Tuskegee Airmen helped win a war, and you helped change our nation for the better," Bush said. "Yours is the story of the human spirit, and it ends like all great stories do – with wisdom and lessons and hope for tomorrow. And the medal that we confer today means that we're doing a small part to ensure that your story will be told and honored for generations to come.

"I would like to offer a gesture to help atone for all the unreturned salutes and unforgivable indignities. And so, on behalf of the office I hold, and a country that honors you, I salute you for the service to the United States of America. "

The Tuskegee Airmen were a group of 994 African-American pilots who gained fame during WWII for their heroism escorting American bombers in raids over Europe and North Africa. Their distinguished service is credited with influencing President Truman to desegregate the U.S. military.

Many returned from the war only to face racism and segregation at home. Their stories went largely untold until recently. Organizations like the Red Tail Project are dedicated to continuing to tell their stories and inspiring future generations using the Tuskegee Airmen as an example of hard work and perseverance.

The Congressional Gold Medal was a major official recognition of the Airmen's contributions.

"It was a phenomenal sense of gratification to see these guys get their just due," said Barzen.

Several of the Airmen traveled to Washington courtesy of Northwest Airlines, which paid special recognition to the Airmen aboard their flights.