

## **TOP TEN FALSE CLAIMS ABOUT THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN**

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**With sources**

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**The Tuskegee Airmen have become famous as the first African American pilots in United States military service, and the first African American pilots in combat while in United States military service. The first black commander of an Air Force fighter squadron was a Tuskegee Airman. The first black commander of an Air Force bomber squadron was a Tuskegee Airman. The first black commander of an Air Force fighter group was a Tuskegee Airman. The first black commander of an Air Force fighter wing was a Tuskegee Airman. The first black commander of an Air Force base was a Tuskegee Airman. The first black general in the United States Air Force was a Tuskegee Airman. The first black four-star general in American military service was a Tuskegee Airman. The first three black generals in the United States Air Force were Tuskegee Airmen. The Tuskegee Airmen proved they were the equal of their white counterparts in combat in World War II, shooting down 112 enemy airplanes, three of them German jets. The Tuskegee Airmen's 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group was most famous for escorting heavy bombers of the Fifteenth Air Force during World War II. Of the 179 bomber escort missions they flew, bombers under their protection were shot down by enemy fighters on only 7 of those missions. Only 27 bombers under Tuskegee Airmen escort were shot down by enemy airplanes, while the average number of bombers lost to enemy aircraft, by the other fighter escort groups of the Fifteenth Air Force, was 46. The Tuskegee Airmen lost significantly fewer bombers than the other escort groups. At first the black combat pilots were largely forgotten. Their records, like those of the white pilots, were largely classified for years after the war. In 1955, Charles Francis wrote a book about the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group pilots called *The Tuskegee Airmen*, and coined that term. Despite the book, the only African American combat pilots in World War II remained largely obscure from public attention until 1995, when Home Box Office (HBO) televised a movie called *The Tuskegee Airmen*. At last they were nationally famous.**

**FALSE CLAIM ONE: THAT THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN "NEVER LOST A BOMBER"**

Unfortunately, the HBO movie *The Tuskegee Airmen* included the most famous of the false claims about the Tuskegee Airmen: that when they flew their red-tailed Mustang fighters to escort bombers, they “never lost a bomber” to enemy airplanes. The statement was not true, but for years people generally associated the Tuskegee Airmen with the “never lost a bomber” claim.

The idea that no bomber under Tuskegee Airmen escort was ever shot down by enemy fighters probably originated in March 1945, when Roi Ottley, a journalist, wrote an article in *Liberty* magazine that claimed the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group had not lost a bomber in 100 missions. By the time the article was published, on March 10, the Tuskegee Airmen had flown more than 130 bomber escort missions, and had lost bombers on only six of those missions. The Tuskegee Airmen had flown more than 100 bomber escort missions without losing a bomber, but they had lost bombers, and the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group did not fly 100 bomber escort missions before losing bombers. In fact, the group lost escorted bombers on its second heavy bomber escort mission, and all the losses had been in the summer of 1944. The 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group had not lost bombers in at least six months just previous to the article’s publication, and that might have contributed to the idea that the group had “never lost a bomber,” when in fact it had lost 24 escorted bombers to enemy airplanes during six missions by March 10, 1945, the date of Ottley’s article. Those losses occurred during the summer of 1944.

Two weeks after Ottley’s article was published, the African American newspaper *The Chicago Defender*, in an article published on March 24, 1945, claimed that the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group flew its 200<sup>th</sup> mission without loss. That story was false, since the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group had not yet flown 200 bomber escort missions, and it had lost bombers on six bomber escort missions. Ironically, the group lost three more escorted bombers to enemy aircraft on March 24, 1945, the same day the article was published, to make a total of seven missions during which Tuskegee Airmen-escorted bombers were shot down by enemy airplanes.

The original claim evolved from never lost a bomber in 100 missions to never lost a bomber in 200 missions, to never lost a bomber. The myth evolved as it was repeated.

By the end of World War II, the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group had flown 179 bomber escort missions for the Fifteenth Air Force between early June 1944 and the end of April 1945. Bombers under Tuskegee Airmen escort were shot down by

enemy airplanes on only seven of those missions. In other words, the Tuskegee Airmen did not lose a bomber on 172 bomber escort missions, but lost bombers on 7 missions. The Tuskegee Airmen did not fly 172 bomber escort missions before losing a bomber. In fact, it lost bombers on its second bomber escort mission for the Fifteenth Air Force on 9 June 1944. The Distinguished Flying Cross for Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., awarded for that mission, noted that he so skillfully managed his fighter escorts that only a few bombers were shot down that day. The total number of bombers under Tuskegee Airmen escort that were shot down by enemy airplanes during World War II was 27. The average number of bombers shot down while under the escort of the one of the six other fighter escort groups of the Fifteenth Air Force was 46. The Tuskegee Airmen lost significantly fewer bombers they escorted, to enemy fighters, than the average of the white fighter groups in the Fifteenth Air Force.

One should be aware, however, that most of the 179 bomber escort missions the Tuskegee Airmen flew for the Fifteenth Air Force encountered no enemy airplanes. The daily narrative mission reports for the majority of the missions claim no enemy aircraft encounters. By the time the Tuskegee Airmen began escorting bombers, in June 1944, and especially after the summer of 1944, the German air force, the Luftwaffe, had lost much of its former strength, and was not responding to every bombing attack, especially attacks coming from Italy that were not threatening the industrial Ruhr and the capital at Berlin. For most of the 332<sup>d</sup> Fighter Group's bomber escort missions, the reason bombers were not shot down by enemy airplanes was because enemy airplanes did not show up to attempt to shoot them down.

Sources: 332d Fighter Group daily narrative mission reports, contained in the monthly histories of the group, from June 1944 through April 1945; Fifteenth Air Force narrative mission reports for the 332<sup>d</sup> Fighter Group and the bombardment groups it escorted for each day the group escorted bombers; Missing air crew reports for each group for each day, showing when, where, and how each of the bombers was lost, including witness statements.

## **FALSE CLAIM TWO: THAT THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN WERE INFERIOR TO THE WHITE FIGHTER PILOTS**

Even before they had a chance to enter combat, there were many white racists, even among U.S. Army leaders, who did not believe they were the equal

of white pilots. When the 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron served in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations, before the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group deployed overseas, it was attached to various white fighter groups. One of these was the 33d Fighter Group under Colonel William W. Momyer. Momyer did not believe the all-black 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron was performing well, and recommended that it be taken out of combat. The squadron had shot down only one enemy airplane, and Momyer thought it scattered when encountered by the enemy. His charges were transmitted up the chain of command all the way to the headquarters of the Army Air Forces. The War Department directed that a study be undertaken to compare the combat performance of the 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron with the other P-40 squadrons in the Mediterranean Theater in 1943. The study concluded that the Tuskegee Airmen's 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron was performing just as well as the white P-40 fighter squadrons, and the 99<sup>th</sup> was not taken out of combat. The only reason the 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron shot down only one enemy airplane in the first several months of its combat operations was lack of opportunity. The squadron was then serving the Twelfth Air Force, and most of its missions were to support ground forces. The same was true of the white fighter squadrons of the Twelfth Air Force. Yet there were some opportunities to shoot down enemy airplanes even while the 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron was still serving the Twelfth Air Force. On two days in January 1944, the 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron shot down 13 enemy airplanes over Anzio. That was a higher number than any of the other Twelfth Air Force fighter squadrons during those two days.

In the middle of 1944, the 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron was assigned to the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group, which included the 100<sup>th</sup>, 301<sup>st</sup>, and 302<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Squadrons. At the same time, the black fighter group and its squadrons were reassigned from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Air Force, and given the mission of escorting heavy bombers such as four-engine B-17s and B-24s. There was more opportunity to shoot down enemy fighters, especially after the black fighter pilots began flying the P-51 Mustang fighter.

The Tuskegee Airmen's 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group flew 179 bomber escort missions for the Fifteenth Air Force, and lost bombers to enemy airplanes on only 7 of those missions. The average number of bombers lost to enemy aircraft by the other Fifteenth Air Force fighter groups was 46, but only 27 bombers under Tuskegee Airmen escort are known to have been shot down by enemy airplanes. The Tuskegee Airmen lost significantly fewer of its escorted bombers

to enemy aircraft than the other groups. Instead of being inferior to the white fighter pilots, some observers believed that they showed superiority instead.

Sources: Army Air Forces Statistical Digest for World War II (Washington, DC: Statistical Control Division, Office of Air Comptroller, June 1947), p. 256, table 160; War Department report on 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron performance, in comparison with other P-40 squadrons in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations, released in March 1944 (Air Force Historical Research Agency call number 134.65-496).

### **FALSE CLAIM THREE: THAT THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN OUTPERFORMED THE WHITE FIGHTER PILOTS**

Certain persons have claimed that the Tuskegee Airmen not only refuted the claim that they were inferior to the white fighter pilots, but were superior to them. Even if bombers under their escort were sometimes shot down by enemy airplanes, they lost fewer bombers than the average of the other fighter groups in the Fifteenth Air Force during the same period. However, when looking at other statistics, the black pilots did not outperform the white pilots.

In terms of shooting down enemy airplanes, each of the white P-51 fighter groups in the Fifteenth Air Force outscored the black one. Between early June 1944 and the end of April 1945, when the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group was flying its bomber escort missions, it shot down 94 enemy airplanes (the 112 figure includes the number of enemy airplanes the 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron shot down before it was assigned to the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group, and before the bomber escort missions for the Fifteenth Air Force). Each one of the other three P-51 groups in the Fifteenth Air Force shot down more than 200 in the same period. The 31<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group shot down 278 enemy airplanes, the 325<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group 252, the 52d Fighter Group 224.5. This was true despite the fact that the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group, for nine of the eleven months it escorted bombers for the Fifteenth Air Force, had one more fighter squadron than the other P-51 groups. The 332d Fighter Group had four fighter squadrons, and the other groups had three each. In other words, despite the fact that the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group had more airplanes and pilots than the other fighter groups, it shot down far fewer enemy airplanes. Moreover, it was the only one of the seven fighter groups in the Fifteenth Air Force (four flew P-51s and three flew P-38s) that had no aces, if ace is defined as having shot down at least five enemy airplanes. Three of the

**Tuskegee Airmen shot down four enemy airplanes, but none shot down five or more.**

**The Tuskegee Airmen shot down a total of 112 enemy airplanes, but that total comes from adding the number of enemy airplanes the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group or its squadrons scored in World War II (94) to the number the 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron scored before it was assigned to the 332d Fighter Group in the middle of 1944.**

**In terms of bomber protection, the 332d Fighter Group outperformed the white fighter groups in the Fifteenth Air Force, but in terms of shooting down enemy airplanes, the 332d Fighter Group underperformed them. All depends on which statistics are considered.**

**Source: USAF Historical Study 85, USAF Credits for the Destruction of Enemy Aircraft, World War II, published by the Office of Air Force History in Washington, DC in 1978, listing aerial victory credits for each squadron and group.**

#### **FALSE CLAIM FOUR: THAT LEE ARCHER WAS A TUSKEGEE AIRMAN ACE**

**This leads us to another false claim: that Lt. Lee Archer as the only Tuskegee Airman ace, but one of his aerial victories was taken away or reduced by half in order to prevent any of the black pilots from becoming an ace.**

**Research into the documents of the Tuskegee Airmen themselves from World War II, shows that Lt. Lee Archer, during the war, claimed to have shot down a total of four enemy airplanes, one on July 18, 1944, and three more on October 12, 1944. For each of his claims, he was awarded an aerial victory credit, for a total of four aerial victory credits for having shot down four enemy airplanes. He was one of three Tuskegee Airmen to have shot down four enemy airplanes, and one of four Tuskegee Airmen to have shot down three enemy airplanes in one day. However, none of the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group members shot down more than four enemy airplanes, and thus none of them were aces for having shot down five or more. There is no evidence among the documents that someone intervened to deny or take away any of Lee Archer's aerial victory credits. The claim that Archer had five aerial victory credits, and one was reduced or taken away, apparently emerged after the war.**

**Not long before Lee Archer died, he was honored by Air University's Air Command and Staff College, in a Gathering of Eagles ceremony. He was**

recognized for having shot down a total of four enemy airplanes in World War II. By the time he died in 2010, he knew that the Air Force records verified he had shot down a total of four enemy airplanes, not five.

Sources: Individual aerial victory credit cards per pilot per victory, at the Air Force Historical Research Agency, showing sources for each victory; Twelfth and Fifteenth Air Force orders awarding aerial victory credits to individuals; 332d Fighter Group narrative mission reports, contained in monthly histories of the group; Monthly histories of the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group at the Air Force Historical Research Agency.

#### **FALSE CLAIM FIVE: THAT TUSKEGEE AIRMAN ROSCOE BROWN WAS THE FIRST AMERICAN PILOT TO SHOOT DOWN A GERMAN ME262 JET**

A fifth common false claim about the Tuskegee Airmen was that Lt. Roscoe Brown was the first American pilot to shoot down a German Me-262 jet airplane. Lt. Brown was one of three members of the 100<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group, to shoot down an Me-262 on a mission to Berlin on 24 March 1945. In other words, he was one of three Tuskegee Airmen to shoot down German jet fighters. His claim to have been the first of the Tuskegee Airmen to shoot down a German jet was later twisted into a claim that he was the first American pilot to shoot down a German jet. In fact, American pilots began shooting down Me-262s in August 1944, seven months earlier. U.S. Army Air Forces pilots shot down sixty German Me-262 jets before any Tuskegee Airmen did. Roscoe Brown might have not even been the first of the Tuskegee Airmen to shoot down a German jet, since documentation about the three aerial victories suggests it might have been one of the others.

Sources: Robert F. Dorr, *Fighting Hitler's Jets* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Zenith Press, 2013), appendix B, pp. 281-289; Frank Olynyk studies on aerial victory credits, victory credits lists numbers 5 and 6; USAF Historical Study 85, USAF Credits for the Destruction of Enemy Aircraft, World War II.

#### **FALSE CLAIM SIX: THAT TUSKEGEE AIRMEN SANK A GERMAN BATTLESHIP OR DESTROYER**

Still another false claim in wide circulation regarding the Tuskegee Airmen is that they sank a German battleship or destroyer in the northern Adriatic Sea on June 25, 1944. The June 1944 history of the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group mentions the claim, noting that eight P-47 pilots strafed a German warship, and that it sank. Other historical research by naval historians examining German ship losses in World War II, however, indicates that the only German warship attacked by Allied airplanes in the same area and date was the TA-22, a former Italian World War I-era destroyer that had been called the Guiseppe Missori. The date and place match, but the TA-22 did not sink on June 25, 1944. It was scuttled on May 3, 1945, more than ten months after it had supposedly been sunk by Tuskegee Airmen pilots.

Sources: 332d Fighter Group history for June 1944; 332d Fighter Group narrative mission report for 25 Jun 1944; David Brown, *Warship Losses of World War II* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990); "Fighting Ships of the World" website of Ivan Gogin ([http://www.navy-pedia.org/ships/Germany/ger\\_tb\\_ta22.htm](http://www.navy-pedia.org/ships/Germany/ger_tb_ta22.htm)); Aldo Fraccaroli, *Italian Warships of World War II* (London: Ian Allan, 1968); Jurgen Rohwer, *Chronology of the War at Sea* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2005), p. 338.

**FALSE CLAIM SEVEN: THAT TUSKEGEE AIRMAN COLONEL CHARLES MCGEE FLEW MORE MISSIONS THAN ANY OTHER AIR FORCE PILOTS, OR MORE FIGHTER COMBAT MISSIONS IN THREE WARS THAN ANY OTHER AIR FORCE PILOT**

Tuskegee Airman Colonel Charles McGee is one of the most famous of the Tuskegee Airmen. He flew fighter combat missions for his country in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, and his total number of fighter combat missions in those three wars is 409. He flew at least 100 fighter combat missions in each of those wars. All of that is outstanding. Colonel McGee is a modest man who does not brag about all that he has done, and he does not claim to have accomplished what he has not.

Others, with good intentions, have made superlative claims about Colonel McGee that are not true. To give you an example, at the 1994 Tuskegee Airmen Incorporated national convention in Atlanta, Georgia, United States Air Force General Ronald Fogleman, who became the USAF Chief of Staff later that same year, claimed that Col. McGee "racked up the highest three-war total of fighter

missions of any Air Force aviator-409 missions...” That statement is not accurate, but General Fogleman was not aware that it was false.

Among the claims I have heard or read about Colonel McGee are these: that he flew more combat missions than any other Air Force pilot; that he flew more fighter combat missions than any other Air Force pilot; that he flew more combat missions in three wars than any other Air Force pilot; that he flew more fighter combat missions in three wars than any other Air Force fighter pilot; and that he was the only Air Force pilot to have flown at least 100 fighter combat missions in three wars. None of those claims is true.

As you can see in the table below, Colonel McGee did not fly more combat missions than any other Air Force pilot, did not fly more fighter combat missions than any other Air Force pilot, did not fly more combat missions in three wars than any other Air Force pilot, and did not fly more fighter combat missions in three wars than any other Air Force pilot, and was not the only Air Force pilot to have flown at least 100 fighter combat missions in three wars.

There were only two Air Force pilots known to have flown at least 100 fighter combat missions in the three wars, Colonel Harold S. Snow and Colonel Charles E. McGee. Of them, Colonel McGee flew more fighter combat missions (409 for McGee compared with 331 for Snow). Of the known Air Force pilots who flew at least 100 fighter combat missions in each war, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, McGee has the highest number of fighter combat missions.

**KNOWN USAF PILOTS WITH AT LEAST 400 COMBAT MISSIONS**

<b>Name</b>	<b>World War II</b>	<b>Korea</b>	<b>Southeast Asia</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Lloyd J. Probst (transport pilot)</b>			<b>1,248</b>	<b>1,248</b>
<b>Philip Anderson (transport pilot)</b>			<b>1,000+</b>	<b>1,000+</b>
<b>Jay Soukup (transport pilot)</b>			<b>935</b>	<b>935</b>
<b>Alan Gropman (transport pilot)</b>			<b>671</b>	<b>671</b>
<b>Harold S. Snow (fighter and FAC pilot)</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>335 (130 of these were</b>	<b>666 (331 of these were</b>

			fighter missions)	fighter missions)
Ralph S. Parr (fighter pilot)	12	202	427	641
Don Kilgus (fighter pilot)			624	624
Kenneth R. Hughey (fighter pilot)			564	564
Donald Blakeslee (fighter pilot)	Almost 500			Almost 500
James Cronk (fighter pilot)			480	480
Adolphus H. Bledsoe (FAC pilot)			422	422
Charles E. McGee (fighter pilot)	136	100	173	409

Sources: John L. Frisbee, "The Pinnacle of Professionalism," *Air Force Magazine*, (February 1987), p. 109; "Ralph S. Parr, Fighter Pilot," *Daedalus Flyer*, vol. XXXVI, no. 2 (Summer 1996), pp. 15-21; John Mollison, "666 The Devil's number: The Amazing Service of Hank Snow" (2013), from website: JohnMollison.com; Gerry May, "Hometown Patriot" (online); Abbey Weingarten, "Pilot Flew 935 Missions in Vietnam" (online); Terry Brown, "Fighter Pilot Who Flew 666 Combat Missions in Three Wars Dies," *Times Union*; Dennis Hevisi, Blakeslee article from New York Times News Service; Charlene E. McGee Smith, *Tuskegee Airman: The Biography of Charles E. McGee* (Boston, MA: Branden Publishing Company, 1999).

**FALSE CLAIM EIGHT: THAT ELEANOR ROOSEVELT CONVINCED HER HUSBAND TO START TRAINING AFRICAN AMERICAN PILOTS IN THE U.S. MILITARY**

There is a famous photograph of Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, sitting in a Piper Cub aircraft with a black pilot, Charles Alfred "Chief" Anderson, who took her for a ride over Tuskegee at the end of March 1941. Anderson was teaching civilian pilots at Tuskegee Institute. This

event led some to the false claim that after Eleanor Roosevelt had ridden with a black pilot, she went back to Washington, DC, and persuaded her husband to begin training of black U.S. military pilots.

The War Department had already announced, at the beginning of 1941, that black cadets would be accepted for military flight training, and that the training would be undertaken at Tuskegee. In fact, the first black flying unit, the 99<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron, later called the 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, had been both constituted and activated before Mrs. Roosevelt's Tuskegee flight. The 99<sup>th</sup> did not yet have any pilots, because they had not yet been trained at Tuskegee, but Eleanor Roosevelt's flight at Tuskegee in late March 1941 was not the stimulus for black military flight training, for which the ball was already rolling.

Source: Robert J. Jakeman, *The Divided Skies* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1992), p. 221, 228; 245-247.

#### **FALSE CLAIM NINE: THAT THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN WERE THE ONLY FIGHTER GROUP TO ESCORT FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE BOMBERS ON THE BERLIN MISSION**

By 2018, two full-length motion pictures had been released about the Tuskegee Airmen: *The Tuskegee Airmen* in 1995, and George Lucas' *Red Tails* in 2012. Both of them perpetuated another false claim about the Tuskegee Airmen: that the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group was the only fighter escort group to escort Fifteenth Air Force bombers on their only raid on Berlin on March 24, 1945. The myth is that another white fighter escort group failed to show up, but the black pilots continued their mission to protect the bombers.

Records of the Fifteenth Air Force and its groups, however, show that five Fifteenth Air Force fighter escort groups flew to Berlin that day, and none of them failed to show up. In fact, as the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group shot down 3 German jets over Berlin that day, another Fifteenth Air Force P-51 group, the 31<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group, shot down 5 more in the same area. The Tuskegee Airmen were not the only fighter pilots to escort bombers over Berlin on the longest Fifteenth Air Force mission of World War II.

Sources: Fifteenth Air Force mission reports from groups for 24 March 1945 mission to Berlin, including those of the 31<sup>st</sup>, 52<sup>d</sup>, 325<sup>th</sup>, and 332<sup>d</sup> Fighter Groups, at the Air Force Historical Research Agency.

**FALSE CLAIM TEN: THAT THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN WON THE FIRST USAF GUNNERY MEET, BUT THEIR VICTORY TROPHY WAS HIDDEN FOR DECADES TO OBSCURE THE FACT THE BLACK FIGHTER GROUP DEFEATED ALL THE WHITE FIGHTER GROUPS IN THE COMPETITION**

**One more false claim about the Tuskegee Airmen is that their 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group won the first USAF gunnery competition in Las Vegas in 1949, defeating all the white fighter groups, and that the trophy they had earned was deliberately hidden for many decades in an attempt to hide the fact that black pilots had won. Another false claim, associated with that one, is that the gunnery meets were ended after the black group won, in an effort to hide their achievement. In truth, the all-black 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group won the propeller aircraft category at the 1949 USAF gunnery meet, and the all-white 4<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group won the jet aircraft category. The jet and propeller-driven aircraft pilots were not competing against each other, but against others in their category. There was no overall winner, because each of the two categories had a different set of events, with a different maximum number of points per category.**

**The names of both the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group and the 4<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group were engraved on the trophy plate. At the 1950 USAF gunnery meet, held the very next year, also at Las Vegas, two other groups won, and the names of those two groups were also engraved on the trophy. Only one of the four organizations listed on the trophy was black. The trophy was not deliberately hidden to obscure African American achievement, because hiding the trophy would also obscure the achievements of the three other groups. Moreover, there was not yet an Air Force Museum at which to display the trophy. No one was hiding the trophy to obscure the Tuskegee Airmen and their accomplishments. Moreover, the USAF gunnery meets were discontinued in 1950, not because a black group had won, but because of the Korean War had broken out, and the best fighter pilots and aircraft were needed overseas.**

**Sources: Exhibit of trophy for the winning teams at the 1949 and 1950 USAF Gunnery Meets in Las Vegas, Nevada, at the National Museum of the United States Air Force, at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio; Lineage and honors history and organizational records of the National Museum of the United States Air Force; Score sheets from the 1949 USAF Gunnery Meet, from Gerald**

**White, historian of the 99<sup>th</sup> Air Base Wing, stationed at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, at Las Vegas.**

## **CONCLUSION**

**Discarding the false claims about the Tuskegee Airmen allows people to appreciate what they actually accomplished. They were better than the white pilots in certain categories, and worse than them in other categories. They were neither superior nor inferior but equal. We should celebrate them partly because they proved, in an age of segregation, that black pilots could do whatever white pilots could do. They had an excellent record, and there is absolutely no need to exaggerate their accomplishments as if the truth were not enough.**

**Daniel Haulman  
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