



Foundation Document Overview

Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site

Alabama



Contact Information

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Purpose



TUSKEGEE AIRMEN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE commemorates the struggle and triumph of the Tuskegee Airmen at Moton Field, site of the primary African American flight training facility during World War II, and their contributions to the integration of the U.S. military and subsequent civil rights advancements.



Significance

Significance statements express why Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Moton Field was the first and only primary flight training facility for African American pilot candidates in the U.S. Army Air Corps (Army Air Forces) during World War II, and the facility symbolizes the entrance of the first African American pilots into the Army Air Corps.
- The accomplishments of the Tuskegee Airmen helped pave the way for desegregation of the military in 1948, which helped set the stage for civil rights advocates to continue the struggle to end racial discrimination during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.
- Tuskegee Institute played an important role in providing economic and educational resources to make the entry of African American pilots into the military possible, although on a segregated basis. Tuskegee Institute was one of a very few American institutions—and the only African American institution—to own, develop, and control facilities for military flight instruction.



Significance

- Political pressure exerted by the black press and civil rights groups greatly influenced the formation of the Tuskegee Airmen, making them an excellent example of the struggle by African Americans to serve in the United States military.
- The Tuskegee Airmen constituted the first African American military pilots, and the civilian men and women who supported their operations. As the first African American soldiers to complete their training and enter the Army Air Corps, the Tuskegee Airmen comprised about 1,000 aviators, and more than 15,000 military and civilian African American men and women supported those efforts.
- Acceptance from Army Air Forces units came slowly, but the Tuskegee Airmen's courageous, and in many cases, heroic performances, earned them increased combat opportunities and respect. The success of the Tuskegee Airmen proved to the American public that African Americans, when given the opportunity, could become effective military leaders and pilots.
- In April 1945, at Freeman Field in Indiana, black officers from the 477th Bombardment Group were arrested for peaceably protesting the segregated officers' club. Their stand, along with the superb performance of the fighter squadrons, helped convince President Harry S Truman to sign Executive Order 9981 in July 26, 1948, calling for "equity of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin," which led to the integration of the U.S. military over the subsequent decades.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Historic Core of Moton Field.** The historic core is a cultural landscape that comprises the area of Hangar 1, the reconstructed Hangar 2, Moton Field's original control tower, tarmac, Skyway Officers club (formerly All Ranks Club), Bath and Locker building, vehicle warehouse, ghost structures, and historic roads. This area is restored and maintained to its appearance as of 1945.
- **Oral History Collection.** Tuskegee Airmen's oral history collection includes approximately 1,500 audio and video recordings of interviews with the original Tuskegee Airmen and their family members about their roles during World War II. All of the recordings have been transcribed. There are two collections of oral histories: one created for the 2002 Tuskegee Airmen Oral History Project, and a second oral history project to support a documentary film, which includes high-definition recordings.
- **Tuskegee Airmen Museum Collection.** This collection contains artifacts, historic photographs, documentation such as records, orders, archives, graduation dates, yearbooks, maps, etc., associated with the history and significance of the Tuskegee Airmen. This collection is housed at the park and at Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site four miles away, and at the NPS Southeast Archeological Center in Tallahassee, Florida.



Description

In 1998, Congress established the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site as a unit of the national park system to commemorate the establishment and history of the Tuskegee Airmen at Moton Field, Tuskegee, Alabama.

In 1941, partly in response to political pressure to include African Americans and other minorities in the armed forces, the U.S. Army Air Corps began a program in Tuskegee known as the “Tuskegee Airmen Experiment.” By the program’s end in 1948, more than 10,000 African Americans had received training as flight instructors, officers, fighter pilots, bombardiers, navigators, radio technicians, mechanics, air traffic controllers, instrument and weather forecasters, electrical and communication specialists, aircraft armorers, gunnery specialists, and parachute riggers. Hundreds more African American men and women were trained in flight support occupations such as administration, supply, firefighting, transportation, medicine, laboratory technologies, food service, and music. African American air cadets received primary flight training at Moton Field. Instructional programs were conducted by personnel from Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University) and the U.S. Army. The African American pilots, air crews, and support personnel (male and female) of these segregated units have become known as the “Tuskegee Airmen.” Commanded by Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., the Tuskegee Airmen distinguished themselves during World War II in air engagements over North Africa and southern Europe. By war’s end, the Tuskegee Airmen had flown more than 15,500 sorties and completed 1,578 combat missions. Their combat success included the destruction of more than 260 enemy aircraft, numerous enemy ground installations, and an enemy destroyer. Instances of individual bravery and sacrifice earned the Tuskegee Airmen some of the Army Air Corps’ highest military honors including the Distinguished Flying Cross, Legion of Merit, Silver Star, and Purple Heart.

The efforts, courage, professionalism, and performance of African American men and women during the war, whether on the flight line or behind the battle lines, clearly demonstrated to all Americans that African Americans were wholly capable and deserving members of the U.S. military.

On July 26, 1948, President Harry S Truman issued Executive Order 9981, which officially desegregated the U.S. Armed Forces and called for fair and equal treatment of African American military defense workers, a significant step toward breaking down long-standing racial barriers within the military establishment. The success of the Tuskegee Airmen Experiment and the accomplishments of the Tuskegee Airmen are nationally significant events that set the stage for future civil rights advances. In 2007, the Tuskegee Airmen received the highest civilian award bestowed by the nation, the Congressional Gold Medal, awarded “on behalf of the Tuskegee Airmen, collectively, in recognition of their unique military record, which inspired revolutionary reform in the Armed Forces.”

Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site is a 90-acre site in Macon County, Alabama, about two miles north of the City of Tuskegee. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1998, the national historic site includes 9 of the airfield’s original 15 historic structures and the Moton Field cultural landscape. Extant historic structures are Hangar 1, Skyway Club, Control Tower, Bath and Locker House, Warehouse/ Vehicle Storage Building, Dope Storage Shed, Oil Storage Shed, Fire Protection Shed, and Entrance Gate. Visitors to Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site can tour Moton Field, the Tuskegee Army Primary Flying Field, view Hangar 1’s exhibits and historic airplanes, and experience Hangar 2’s interactive exhibits and films and visit its bookstore.

