

Public Law 109–213
109th Congress

An Act

Apr. 11, 2006
[H.R. 1259]

To award a congressional gold medal on behalf of the Tuskegee Airmen, collectively, in recognition of their unique military record, which inspired revolutionary reform in the Armed Forces.

31 USC 5111
note.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. FINDINGS.

The Congress finds the following:

Yancy Williams.

(1) In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt overruled his top generals and ordered the creation of an all Black flight training program. President Roosevelt took this action one day after the NAACP filed suit on behalf of Howard University student Yancy Williams and others in Federal court to force the Department of War to accept Black pilot trainees. Yancy Williams had a civilian pilot's license and had earned an engineering degree. Years later, Major Yancy Williams participated in an air surveillance project created by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

(2) Due to the rigid system of racial segregation that prevailed in the United States during World War II, Black military pilots were trained at a separate airfield built near Tuskegee, Alabama. They became known as the "Tuskegee Airmen".

(3) The Tuskegee Airmen inspired revolutionary reform in the Armed Forces, paving the way for full racial integration in the Armed Forces. They overcame the enormous challenges of prejudice and discrimination, succeeding, despite obstacles that threatened failure.

(4) From all accounts, the training of the Tuskegee Airmen was an experiment established to prove that so-called "coloreds" were incapable of operating expensive and complex combat aircraft. Studies commissioned by the Army War College between 1924 and 1939 concluded that Blacks were unfit for leadership roles and incapable of aviation. Instead, the Tuskegee Airmen excelled.

Benjamin O.
Davis, Jr.

(5) Overall, some 992 Black pilots graduated from the pilot training program of the Tuskegee Army Air Field, with the last class finishing in June 1946, 450 of whom served in combat. The first class of cadets began in July 1941 with 13 airmen, all of whom had college degrees, some with Ph.D. degrees, and all of whom had pilot's licenses. One of the graduates was Captain Benjamin O. Davis Jr., a United States Military Academy graduate. Four aviation cadets were commissioned as second lieutenants, and 5 received Army Air Corps silver pilot wings.

(6) That the experiment achieved success rather than the expected failure is further evidenced by the eventual promotion of 3 of these pioneers through the commissioned officer ranks to flag rank, including the late General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., United States Air Force, the late General Daniel “Chappie” James, United States Air Force, our Nation’s first Black 4-star general, and Major General Lucius Theus, United States Air Force (retired).

Daniel James.
Lucius Theus.

(7) 450 Black fighter pilots under the command of then Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., fought in World War II aerial battles over North Africa, Sicily, and Europe, flying, in succession, P–40, P–39, P–47, and P–51 aircraft. These gallant men flew 15,553 sorties and 1,578 missions with the 12th Tactical Air Force and the 15th Strategic Air Force.

(8) Colonel Davis later became the first Black flag officer of the United States Air Force, retired as a 3-star general, and was honored with a 4th star in retirement by President William J. Clinton.

(9) German pilots, who both feared and respected the Tuskegee Airmen, called them the “Schwartzte Vogelmenschen” (or “Black Birdmen”). White American bomber crews reverently referred to them as the “Black Redtail Angels”, because of the bright red painted on the tail assemblies of their fighter aircraft and because of their reputation for not losing bombers to enemy fighters as they provided close escort for bombing missions over strategic targets in Europe.

(10) The 99th Fighter Squadron, after having distinguished itself over North Africa, Sicily, and Italy, joined 3 other Black squadrons, the 100th, the 301st, and the 302nd, designated as the 332nd Fighter Group. They then comprised the largest fighter unit in the 15th Air Force. From Italian bases, they destroyed many enemy targets on the ground and at sea, including a German destroyer in strafing attacks, and they destroyed numerous enemy aircraft in the air and on the ground.

(11) 66 of these pilots were killed in combat, while another 32 were either forced down or shot down and captured to become prisoners of war. These Black airmen came home with 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, Bronze Stars, Silver Stars, and Legions of Merit, one Presidential Unit Citation, and the Red Star of Yugoslavia.

(12) Other Black pilots, navigators, bombardiers and crewman who were trained for medium bombardment duty as the 477th Bomber Group (Medium) were joined by veterans of the 332nd Fighter Group to form the 477th Composite Group, flying the B–25 and P–47 aircraft. The demands of the members of the 477th Composite Group for parity in treatment and for recognition as competent military professionals, combined with the magnificent wartime records of the 99th Fighter Squadron and the 332nd Fighter Group, led to a review of the racial policies of the Department of War.

(13) In September 1947, the United States Air Force, as a separate service, reactivated the 332d Fighter Group under the Tactical Air command. Members of the 332d Fighter Group were “Top Guns” in the 1st annual Air Force Gunnery Meet in 1949.

(14) For every Black pilot, there were 12 other civilian or military Black men and women performing ground support duties. 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 of the United States.

(15) Major achievements are attributed to many of those who returned to civilian life and earned leadership positions and respect as businessmen, corporate executives, religious leaders, lawyers, doctors, educators, bankers, and political leaders.

Tuskegee
Airmen, Inc.

(16) A period of nearly 30 years of anonymity for the Tuskegee Airmen was ended in 1972 with the founding of Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., in Detroit, Michigan. Organized as a non-military and nonprofit entity, Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., exists primarily to motivate and inspire young Americans to become participants in our Nation's society and its democratic process, and to preserve the history of their legacy.

(17) The Tuskegee Airmen have several memorials in place to perpetuate the memory of who they were and what they accomplished, including—

(A) the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., National Scholarship Fund for high school seniors who excel in mathematics, but need financial assistance to begin a college program;

(B) a museum in historic Fort Wayne in Detroit, Michigan;

(C) Memorial Park at the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio;

(D) a statue of a Tuskegee Airman in the Honor Park at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado; and

(E) a National Historic Site at Moton Field, where primary flight training was performed under contract with the Tuskegee Institute.

SEC. 2. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.

(a) AWARD AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President pro tempore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements for the award, on behalf of the Congress, of a single gold medal of appropriate design in honor of the Tuskegee Airmen, collectively, in recognition of their unique military record, which inspired revolutionary reform in the Armed Forces.

(b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For the purposes of the award referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary of the Treasury (hereafter in this Act referred to as the “Secretary”) shall strike the gold medal with suitable emblems, devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the Secretary.

(c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the gold medal in honor of the Tuskegee Airmen under subsection (a), the gold medal shall be given to the Smithsonian Institution, where it will be displayed as appropriate and made available for research.

(2) SENSE OF THE CONGRESS.—It is the sense of the Congress that the Smithsonian Institution should make the gold

medal received under paragraph (1) available for display elsewhere, particularly at other appropriate locations associated with the Tuskegee Airmen.

SEC. 3. DUPLICATE MEDALS.

Under such regulations as the Secretary may prescribe, the Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in bronze of the gold medal struck under section 2, at a price sufficient to cover the costs of the medals, including labor, materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

SEC. 4. NATIONAL MEDALS.

Medals struck pursuant to this Act are national medals for purposes of chapter 51 of title 31, United States Code.

SEC. 5. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS; PROCEEDS OF SALE.

(a) **AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**—There is authorized to be charged against the United States Mint Public Enterprise Fund, an amount not to exceed \$30,000 to pay for the cost of the medals authorized under section 2.

(b) **PROCEEDS OF SALE.**—Amounts received from the sale of duplicate bronze medals under section 3 shall be deposited in the United States Mint Public Enterprise Fund.

Approved April 11, 2006.