

Name _____

Date _____



The Tuskegee Airmen

Today we're going to talk about the Tuskegee Airmen...in just a minute.

The Tuskegee Airmen were the first African American military pilots.

In the early 20th century, the US military, like most of the country, was segregated. Black and white troops served in separate platoons, and Black people weren't allowed to join the Army Air Corps at all.

That started to change when World War II began. The Air Corps decided to accept Black servicemen into their ranks. They would train at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. The all-Black 99th Fighter Squadron was first deployed to North Africa, then to Italy, where they became known for courageously defending bomber planes. The unit eventually expanded and was nicknamed the "Red Tails."

Between 1941 and 1946, almost 1,000 Black pilots graduated from Tuskegee. They earned multiple Distinguished Unit Citations, and many went on to long military careers. But they continued to face racism within the military and in society. Civil rights leaders pointed out the disconnect of asking Black Americans to sacrifice their lives for a country that didn't treat them as equals.

The pioneering accomplishments of the Tuskegee Airmen played a huge role in eventually desegregating the military in the 1950s.

What can we learn about US history by studying the Tuskegee Airmen?