

## Buford A. Johnson

Buford A. Johnson enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps on November 22, 1945. He took his basic training at Sheppard Field in Texas and then was assigned to the 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, 477<sup>th</sup> Composite Group at Goodman Field in Kentucky under the command of Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr.

In November of 1946, the 477<sup>th</sup> Composite Group was reassigned to Lockbourne Army Air Base. At this time, Mr. Johnson was assigned to the flight line for training in the repair and maintenance of the Republic P-47N Thunderbolt. The Composite Group was inactivated in 1947, and the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group was reactivated with the 99<sup>th</sup>, 100<sup>th</sup>, and 301<sup>st</sup> Fighter Squadrons.

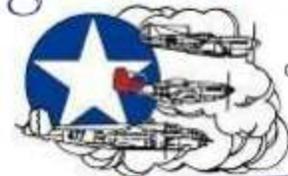
Buford's P-47N was one of 4 aircraft chosen to be in the First Annual USAF Gunnery Meet being held at Nellis Air Force Base where the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Wing won first place in the Conventional Aircraft Class.

In 1949, the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Wing was deactivated. Mr. Johnson was assigned to the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force, 8<sup>th</sup> Fighter-Bomber wing, 80<sup>th</sup> Fighter-Bomber Squadron stationed at Itazuke Air Base in Japan. He was in the cadre of the first African-American airmen to integrate Itazuke Air Base.

S/Sgt. Johnson was assigned as crew chief and assigned his own aircraft, an F-51D Mustang. The aircraft had been cannibalized for spare parts, but S/Sgt. Johnson rose to the challenge and gradually made the aircraft airworthy and combat ready. This earned him the 80<sup>th</sup> FBS first F-80-C Shooting Star. S/Sgt. Johnson was then assigned to be the first African-American jet mechanic in the USAF, and was the first African-American jet mechanic to serve in a combat zone. He served in Korea where he was promoted to T/Sgt.

After only seven years in the Air Force, Mr. Johnson was promoted to the temporary rank of M/Sgt. at Hanscom AFB. His meritorious service with the 417<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron earned him the Air Force Commendation Medal. After 21 years of distinguished service, M/Sgt. Buford A. Johnson retired in August of 1966.

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## Who were the Tuskegee Airmen?



The Tuskegee Airmen were a group of young men who enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps to become America's first black military airmen. These were the men who were involved in what was known as the "Tuskegee Military Experiment." This "experiment" is now known as the "Tuskegee Experience."

Three government initiatives between 1938 and 1940 helped blacks to participate in national defense and to become military pilots.

The 1938 Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) was launched by the federal government to increase the number of civilian pilots who might later become military pilots. Many black college students were able to earn their private pilot's license. In 1940, the Selective Service and Training Service Act was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This act, known as the Burke-Wadsworth Act, was the first peacetime draft in the United States. This allowed any person, "regardless of race or color" to volunteer for induction and specified there would be no discrimination because of race or color. Finally, in 1940, the War Department announced that the Civil Aeronautics Authority, in cooperation with the U.S. Army would begin the development of "colored personnel" for aviation service.

Men came from every part of the country with a strong desire to serve the United States of America. Tuskegee Institute was selected to train pilots because of its commitment to aeronautical training.

The first class with 13 cadets began on July 19, 1941. Ground school training includes such subjects as meteorology, navigation, and instruments. Successful cadets transferred to the segregated Tuskegee Army Air Field to complete the Army Air Corps pilot training.

In March of 1942, 5 of the original 13 cadets completed the Army Air Corps pilot training program and earned their silver wings. They were second lieutenants Lemuel R. Custis, Charles DeBow, Mac Ross, George Spencer Roberts, and Captain Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., a West Point Academy graduate. Captain Davis later became the leader of the Tuskegee Airmen during World War II and went on to become the first black general in the Air Force.

Three hundred and fifty-five of the pilots who trained at the Tuskegee Army Flying School served overseas with the 99<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron and the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group. In addition, a group of twin-engine pilots were also graduated from Tuskegee and were assigned to the 477<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group who flew the B-25 Billy Mitchell, a twin engine medium bomber. However, the war against Japan ended before the 477<sup>th</sup> Group could be deployed overseas.

Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. assumed command of the Group. The unit was re-designated the 477<sup>th</sup> Composite Group on June 22, 1945. The 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron became the fighter component of the composite group. The group was relocated to Lockbourne Army Air Base in Ohio in March of 1946.

From 1941 through 1946 nearly 1,000 pilots graduated from Tuskegee Army Air Field and received commissions and wings. Black navigators, bombardiers, and gunnery crews were trained at other selected military bases. Mechanics were trained at Chanute Air Base in Rantoul, Illinois, until facilities were in place in 1942 at TAAF.

The war in Europe ended in 1945 and black airmen returned to the United States and faced continued racism and bigotry despite their outstanding war record.

The Tuskegee program continued to train new airmen until 1946, with women entering the program in several support fields.



[www.tuskegeearmen.org](http://www.tuskegeearmen.org)

[www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/tuskegee](http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/tuskegee)

