

The Test

The First African-American Aviators In The United States Military

In April 1943 after months of training and preparation, the 99th Fighter Squadron an aviation unit that consisted entirely of African-American personnel landed in North Africa. This was the beginning of the test phase of an experiment that began many months before at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama to determine if black men were capable of being effective combat aviators.

This exhibition tells the story of the first African-American Aviators to serve in the military of the United States. It is story about their struggles in combat overseas and against prejudice and racism in America. It is a very fascinating story that every American should know. While it is a very exciting story about men in war flying incredible machines, locked in mortal combat miles above the earth, it is also a quintessential story about the continuing struggle to make America live up to its ideals, the struggle of every generation to make America more "American".

The story of the 99th Fighter Squadron and the 332nd Fighter Group begins in 1941 months before the bombing of Pearl Harbor and America's entry into the Second World War and ends with the deactivation of the 332nd Fighter Group in 1949 after President Truman signed Executive Order No. 9981 which ended segregation in the Armed Forces. This exhibition will examine the major campaigns and operations in which the 99th FS and the 332nd FG participated, the aircraft they used, the enemy they flew against, key members of the units, and of course the racial struggle faced in America and overseas. Essential to the understanding of this story is an understanding of the life of Black Americans in the first half of the 20TH century. To fully appreciate the significance of the accomplishments of these men an understanding of the world in which they lived is essential.