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**Goodbye to an American Hero**

**Article**

**TUSKEGEE, Alabama** (Achieve3000, January 12, 2013). After a storied career in aviation, education, and service to his country, retired Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Eugene Carter has died. Carter broke color barriers as one of the Tuskegee Airmen, a group of African-American fighter pilots who fought in World War II (WWII).

Carter, who was born in Amory, Mississippi, made history as one of the first-ever African-American pilots to serve in the U.S. military. Between 1942 and 1946, Carter and nearly 1,000 other African-American men trained to become aviators and mechanics with the Army Air Corps’ all-black 99th Fighter Squadron at the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama. In a nod to the location where its basic training period took place, the group would come to be known as the Tuskegee Airmen. (The Tuskegee Institute has since changed its name to Tuskegee University.)

The Tuskegee Airmen went on to become one of the elite outfits in the U.S. military, and prospective members were required to pass arduous physical and mental examinations. But during an era in which bigotry was common, the soldiers faced even tougher obstacles. The military was racially segregated during WWII, and many people—including high-ranking military officials—did not believe that African Americans were fit to serve the country. Carter and his fellow Airmen faced severe prejudice. The Airmen were forced to train as a segregated unit, prohibited from fighting or practicing alongside their white counterparts. Often, they were proscribed from socializing with white soldiers.

Though they faced bigotry at home, Carter and the Tuskegee Airmen fought hard for their country overseas, proving instrumental in the Allies’ victory in WWII. The group was one of the war’s most respected fighter squadrons, successfully completing missions over Europe, the Mediterranean, and North Africa. Carter himself flew 77 missions, once surviving a crash landing.

Despite their heroics overseas, Carter and the other Tuskegee Airmen continued to face discrimination and segregation when they returned home. African-American veterans were excluded from participating in victory parades honoring troops. In some parts of the U.S., they were still subject to legal segregation, barred from using the same swimming pools, restrooms, and other public facilities as those whom they had risked their lives to protect.

After the war, Carter built his life around aviation, returning to Tuskegee to share his knowledge of aviation with others. From 1950 to 1955, he was a professor of air science and an Air Force Reserve Officers’ Training Corps commander at Tuskegee University. He later served as a professor of aerospace studies at the university from 1965 to 1969.

Carter’s wife, Mildred Hemmons Carter, was herself a pilot and groundbreaker—the first woman ever to earn a pilot’s license in the state of Alabama. The couple was married for nearly 70 years, until her death in October 2011.

Carter was also active in promoting the often-overlooked story of the Tuskegee Airmen. In January 2012, Carter and other Airmen attended the premiere of *Red Tails*, a film that celebrates the pilots and their contribution to the war effort. The film’s name comes from a moniker given to the Airmen, who painted the tails of their airplanes red to distinguish themselves from other fighter pilots during the war.
"It's a wonderful feeling that finally there is some recognition...of the Tuskegee Airmen," Carter said of the film.

Carter passed away in November 2012. The pioneering aviator was 95 years old.

"[Carter] fought for freedom from tyranny internationally and for freedom from discrimination at home in America," said Tuskegee University President Gilbert L. Rochon in a statement after Carter's death. "His commitment to excellence and determination to succeed will set the standard for the next generations of Tuskegee Airmen."

_The Associated Press contributed to this story._

**Dictionary**

_arduous (adjective)_ demanded great effort or labor; difficult

_bigotry (noun)_ prejudice or intolerance of people of different races, religions, and so on

_moniker (noun)_ nickname

_proscribe (verb)_ to reject or ban