

Read the text and answer the questions that follow.



During World War II, President Roosevelt directed the Air Corps to admit black units, but they were required to serve in segregated flying units. They faced the same racial tensions and discriminations that existed in the United States at that time but were determined to serve and protect their country in spite of the jaunts and jeers.

Over 1,000 men trained as pilots and earned their wings at the Tuskegee Army Air Field in Tuskegee, Alabama. They flew more than 15,000 missions over North Africa and Europe. The units made ground attacks, patrolled coastlines, and acted as bomber escorts. As bomber escorts, they are credited with never losing an American bomber to enemy aircraft. The red tails of their planes were a welcome sight to the bomber crews that they protected.

The Airmen served in the North African campaign and were transported to Casablanca, Morocco, on the USS Mariposa. Their first combat mission was to attack the small but strategic volcanic island of Pantelleria in the Mediterranean Sea in preparation for the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943. The Tuskegee Airmen were initially equipped with P-40 Warhawks, but later switched to the airplane that they would become most identified with, the P-51 Mustang.

In January 1944, German fighter-bombers raided Anzio but 11 of the Tuskegee Fighter Squadron's pilots shot down enemy fighters, including Capt. Charles B. Hall, who shot down two. The eight fighter squadrons defending Anzio together shot down a total of 32 Germans, and the Tuskegee had the highest score among them with 13. The squadron won its second Distinguished Unit Citation in May 1944, after attacking German positions on Monastery Hill, attacking infantry on the hill for a counterattack, and bombing a nearby strong point to force the surrender of the German garrison.



Flying escort for heavy bombers, they racked up an impressive combat record. Reportedly, the Luftwaffe awarded the Airmen the nickname, "Schwarze Vogelmenschen," or "Black Birdmen." The Allies called the Airmen "Redtails" or "Redtail Angels," because of the distinctive crimson paint on the vertical stabilizers of the unit's aircraft. Although bomber groups would request Redtail escort when possible, few bomber crew members knew at the time that the Redtails were black.

By the end of the war, the Tuskegee Airmen were credited with 109 Luftwaffe aircraft shot down and destruction of numerous fuel dumps, trucks and trains. The squadrons flew more than 1,500 missions. The Tuskegee Airmen were awarded several Silver Stars, 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 8 Purple Hearts, 14 Bronze Stars and 744 Air Medals. In all, 992 pilots were trained in Tuskegee from 1940 to 1946; about 445 deployed overseas and 150 Airmen lost their lives in training or combat.



1. Where did the Tuskegee Airmen get their name?
2. Why were they known as the “Redtails”?
3. Why were there no white pilots in the Tuskegee Airmen?
4. Math Fun: About 450 Tuskegee pilots were deployed and fought over seas and about 150 lost their lives in combat. What percent of the deployed pilots lost their lives?

