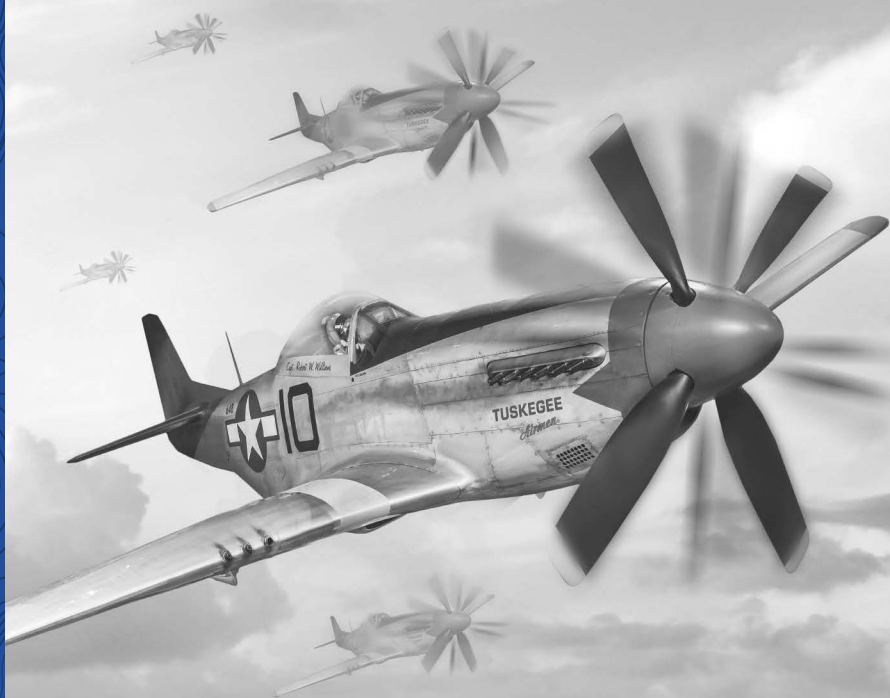


— THE STORY OF —
AMERICA

FLYING HIGH



by Nico Waters



1945—Indiana

John gazed up at the bright blue sky. “It’s a great day to fly.”

His copilot, William, nodded in agreement.



1945

It was 1945. Both pilots were part of the Tuskegee Airmen. This was the first group of Black aviators in the U.S. military.

John and William flew planes in Indiana for the U.S. Army Air Forces. Today, they hopped into a B-25 Mitchell bomber. It was time for another practice drill.

“I’m tired of practicing,” William said. “I can’t wait to fly overseas. That’s where the action is.”

John couldn’t wait either. Both men wanted to serve their country by fighting in World War II. But the commanders in charge didn’t believe Black pilots could handle the pressure. These officers would not let them fly combat missions.

“I hope our day will come soon,” John said.

He flipped switches on the control panel. Then he got permission for takeoff. John pulled the throttle. The plane picked up speed. Soon, the aircraft soared into the Indiana sky.

John spoke into his headset as the engine rumbled in the background. “I love flying. Up here, everything is equal. A plane doesn’t care if the pilot is Black or white. The sky doesn’t discriminate like people do.”

The engine roared as the pilots practiced. After they finished, the men landed the plane on the runway.

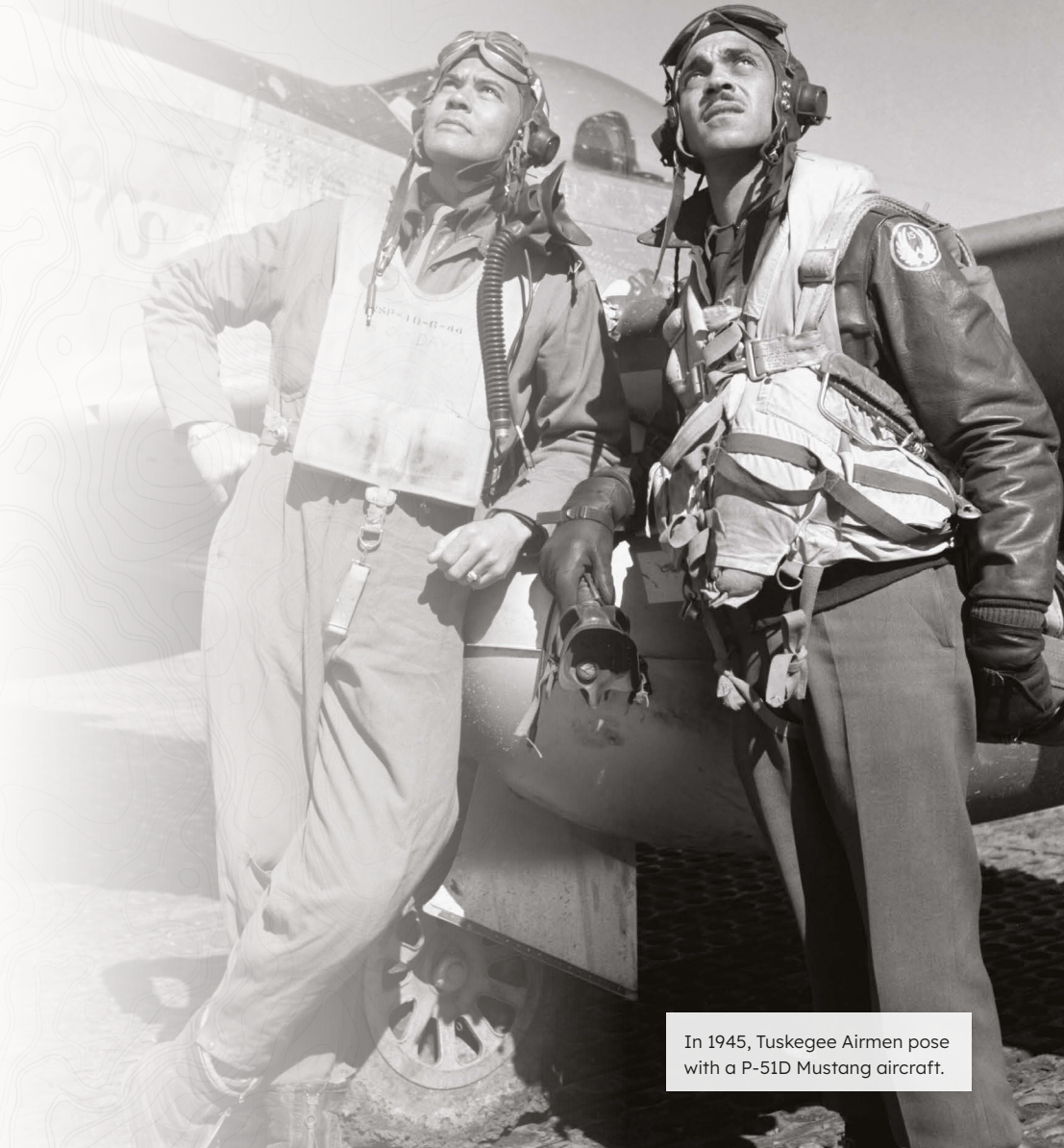
Back on the ground, John and William joined a group of other Black pilots. They were all eager to do their part in the war.

“We’re smart, capable, and ready to fight for our country,” one man said. “But the commanders are holding us back. We aren’t being treated fairly.”

A second pilot chimed in. “As Black men, we have to deal with two enemies: bad guys in the war and racism here at home.”

At This Time in History

This story takes place in 1945. It focuses on the Tuskegee Airmen. They were the first Black military pilots in the United States. The Tuskegee program began in 1940. Before then, Black soldiers were not allowed to fly in the military.



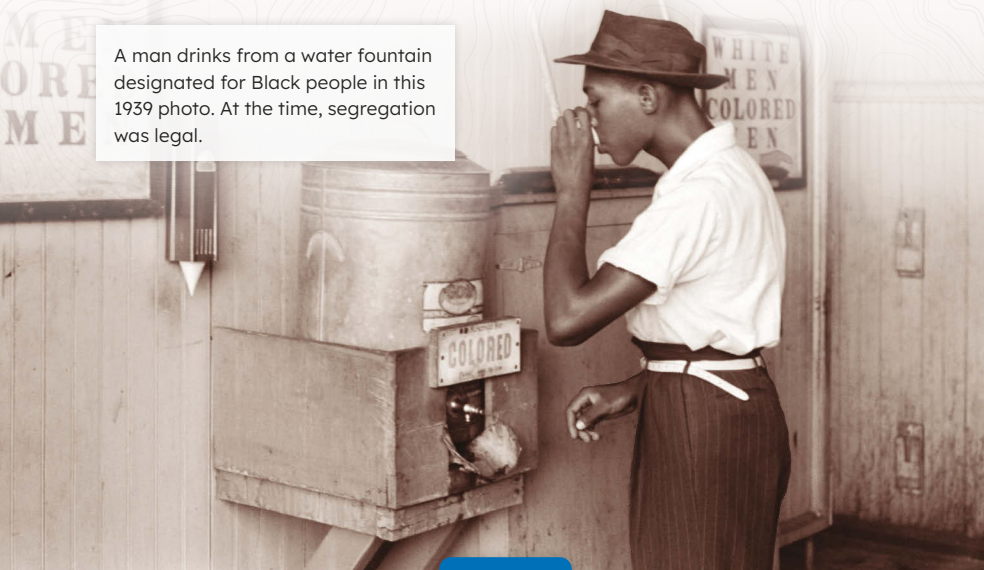
In 1945, Tuskegee Airmen pose with a P-51D Mustang aircraft.

1945

Separate But Not Equal

In the U.S., inequality was widespread. Black people did not have the same rights as white people. That was especially true in the South. The two groups used separate facilities. Black people could not eat in some restaurants. They were not allowed to shop in certain stores either. This forced separation was called segregation. State and local laws made this legal. These were called Jim Crow laws.

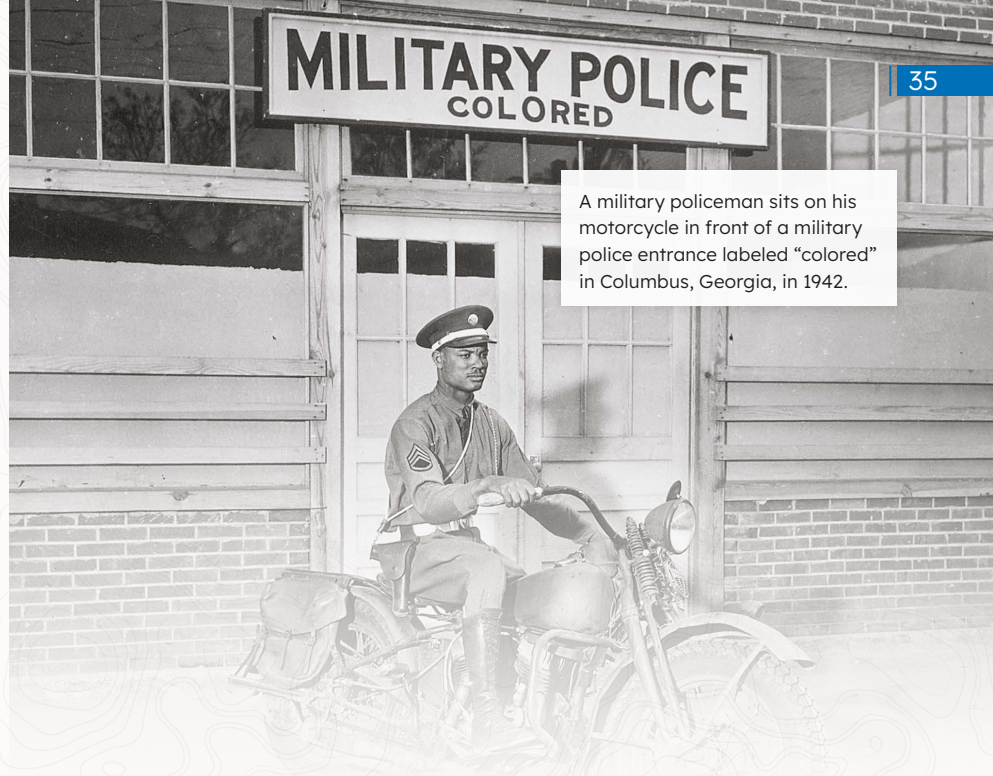
A man drinks from a water fountain designated for Black people in this 1939 photo. At the time, segregation was legal.



1945

MILITARY POLICE
COLORED

A military policeman sits on his motorcycle in front of a military police entrance labeled "colored" in Columbus, Georgia, in 1942.



Inequality was also common in the military. White soldiers were seen as superior. A Black soldier could have a higher rank than a white soldier. But that did not matter. The white soldier would receive better treatment. Special privileges were given to white soldiers. Their barracks were better. They also got to fly in battle.

1939-1959

WORLD WAR II AND THE U.S. AS A GLOBAL SUPERPOWER

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Honoring Papa

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Paper Son

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