

BILL ANALYSIS

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AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Designating the fourth Thursday of March as Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day.

One of the most celebrated military units in our nation's history, the Tuskegee Airmen played a crucial role in the Allied victory in World War II and in the advancement of civil rights in the United States.

Although Black pilots served with French forces during World War I, African Americans were excluded from the U.S. Army Air Corps, even as the nation began preparing for another global conflict in the late 1930s and early 1940s; the NAACP, churches, and newspapers urged an end to this discrimination, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt promised to meet their request during his 1940 campaign; following his victory, he overruled his top generals to order the creation of a separate flight training program for Black aviators in 1941.

The 99th Pursuit Squadron, later renamed the 99th Fighter Squadron, was activated as the first Black flying unit in March of that year; its base was established at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, one of the nation's foremost African American colleges, which already housed a successful civilian pilot training program and owned a small private airfield. Many military leaders of the time considered Black soldiers inferior and expected the initiative to fail, but the staff at Tuskegee Army Air Field immediately began their efforts to prepare accomplished aviators. Colonel Noel F. Parrish, the airfield's commander, mandated the same rigorous training that was provided at other bases, and the determined individuals who made up ranks of the Tuskegee Airmen eagerly took up the challenge of becoming military pilots.

Led by West Point alumnus and future four-star general Benjamin O. Davis Jr., a member of Tuskegee's first graduating class, the pilots of the 99th Fighter Squadron initially proved themselves in battles over North Africa and Italy; the unit later joined three other Black squadrons, the 100th, 301st, and 302nd, to form the 332nd Fighter Group. From bases in Italy, they destroyed numerous enemy aircraft and targets on the ground and at sea; on escort missions for the 15th Air Force, which had been losing a dozen bombers a day, the Tuskegee Airmen achieved a dramatic turnaround, losing just five bombers on 205 missions; their success in protecting Allied aircraft earned them the nickname the Red-Tailed Angels, in reference to the crimson color scheme of their planes.

Between 1942 and 1946, nearly 1,000 Army Air Corps pilots, 20 bomber pilots, and 16,000 ground personnel graduated from Tuskegee; the airmen flew over 15,000 missions and earned more than 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, among myriad other decorations. Their record of excellence contributed to President Harry Truman's decision to end segregation in the military with an executive order in 1948; moreover, many former Tuskegee Airmen became leaders in the Air Force, their communities, and the Civil Rights Movement in the decades that followed.

Through their courage, skill, and patriotic service, the Tuskegee Airmen valiantly answered their nation's call to duty in World War II, contributing immeasurably to the integration of the military and American society as a whole, and their achievements are indeed deserving of special recognition.

RESOLVED

That the 89th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby designate the fourth Thursday of March as Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day.

That, in accordance with the provisions of Section 391.004(d) (relating to providing that a designation of a day, week, or month for recognition expires on the 10th anniversary of the date the legislature finally passes the resolution making the designation), Government Code, this designation remain in effect until the 10th anniversary of the date this resolution is finally passed by the legislature.