

Honorable members of this Legislative Body, we thank you all for your invitation to make a presentation “in favor” of a Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day in the State of Maryland. I am Jerry Burton, National President of Tuskegee Airmen Incorporated.

We, the Tuskegee Airmen Incorporated members, family, and friends come to you humbly and excited to request your support and passage of Senate Bill 0303, and to adopt the resolution for a permanent TUSKEGEE AIRMEN COMMEMORATION DAY in the State of Maryland, on every fourth Thursday in March moving forward. We are a non-profit 501(C)3 organization, chartered in Washington, DC in 1973 by original Tuskegee Airmen and concerned area residents for the opportunities and education of minority and disadvantaged youth. The charter remains fully intact as it was written forty-eight years ago in May, 1973. Many Tuskegee Airmen settled in the counties of Maryland and continued to make an indelible mark on their Maryland communities. Example - Dr. Henry A. Wise and Charles H. Flowers; both have schools named in their honor in Prince Georges County, William Broadwater – the Department of Transportation/FAA, Leroy ‘Boots’ Battle (Douglass Jr/Sr HS) Band Teacher/Leader, Dr. Cyril O. Byron – Morgan State quarterback/Coppin State Educator, Lemuel A. Lewie – Carver VoTech, Edward J. Talbert – Administrator/DC Librarian, Dr. Ivan Ware – Howard University Reserve Officer Training Corp (ROTC) architect. I of course will not omit newly promoted resident of Montgomery County Brigadier General (retired) Charles E. McGee; who is a veteran of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam.

Why do we view the month of March so significant?

- 22 March 1941: The 99th Pursuit Squadron was activated at Chanute Field, Illinois under the command of Captain Harold R. Maddux, a white officer, but composed of African-American enlisted men.
- 24 March 1945: The 332nd Fighter Group took part in the longest World War II raid of the Fifteenth Air Force. Along with other fighter groups of the Fifteenth Air Force, it escorted B-17 bombers of the 5th Bomb Wing on a mission to Berlin, the German capital. On the way the Tuskegee Airmen encountered German Jet Me-262 fighters and shot down three of them. The three victors (in the order of kills) were: 1st Lt. Earl R. Lane, 2nd Lt. Charles V. Brantley, and 1st Lt. Roscoe C. Brown, all of whom belonged to the 100th Fighter Squadron. For this mission, the 332nd Fighter Group earned its only Distinguished Unit Citation of World War II. The group's 99th Fighter Squadron earned its third Distinguished Unit Citation for this mission.

The battle in the United States for equality was as fierce.

- 21 March 1944: Back at Selfridge Field, Michigan, 2nd Lt. Milton R. Henry of the 553rd Fighter Squadron, with African American pilots preparing to replace those overseas, was charged with a series of court martial offenses, including being absent without leave, disrespect of superior officers, and failure to report for duty. Most of the incidents occurred earlier that same month. Back in early January, Henry had attempted to enter the officers' club at Selfridge Field, since he was an officer. Colonel Boyd, the base commander, had ordered him to leave,

and he complied then. The January incident was not directly connected with his court martial trial.

- There was also an attempt of 101 Black Officers – Pilots and Instructors - to enter an Officer's Club at Freeman Field, Indiana. They were all arrested, 98 were issued Letters of Reprimand, and three were court martialed. Final disposition of all 101 Officers was complete exoneration and clearing of the personnel records since the arrests were illegal.

The true history and incredible accomplishments of the Tuskegee Airmen are still being recorded eighty years after the first class of black maintenance officers graduated classes at Chanute Field in Rantoul, Illinois. Tuskegee Airmen Incorporated continues sharing the true history of the Tuskegee Airmen with all adults and young people which we come in contact. With all we seem to have on our side, why do we believe it is necessary at this time to have a TUSKEGGE AIRMEN COMMEMORATION DAY?

1. The Tuskegee Airmen should be commemorated and celebrated in the State of Maryland long after the last Tuskegee Airman has passed away and joined the "Lonely Eagle Squadron".
2. The annual Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day would provide greater opportunities for all concerned organizations and partners to promote activities to benefit youth in the State of Maryland.
3. The State of Maryland would recognize and appreciate the importance of keeping the Tuskegee Airmen legacy alive and provide continued support of

statewide events highlighting their exploits of WW II and the accomplishments after settling in the State of Maryland.

4. The acceptance of this proposal in the State of Maryland will join the Commonwealth of Virginia and the District of Columbia who have adopted the same proposal, with eventual acceptance on a National scale.

I would like to close my remarks as I opened and thank you all for this invitation and for the opportunity to request your support and adoption of Senate Bill 0303 - Tuskegee Airman Commemoration Day every fourth Thursday in March.

Thank You

Jerry Burton, President
Tuskegee Airmen Incorporated
703.307.1952
tai-nationalpresident@tuskegeeairmen.org