

LEGEND OF THE RED TAILS

Certificate of Authenticity

Artist Ray Simon is privileged to have painted a piece of art that pays tribute to the men and women of Tuskegee. Like any serious artist, Ray Simon creates with the intent to provoke thought, evoke feelings and ultimately recognize those who have shown great courage.

The Pittsburgh Courier, an African American newspaper led a campaign asking for young men to fight for a Double Victory, inherently paving the way for a civil rights movement yet to come. These American aviators would wage a two-front war against tyranny, fascism and racism back home.

The Tuskegee Airmen officially began in June of 1941 under the command of Captain Benjamin O. Davis Jr., a West Point graduate. His father, Benjamin Oliver Davis Sr., rose through the ranks in a segregated Army and became the first African American General to serve in the United States Army. Throughout history African Americans have served in the wars that America and her Colonies have fought, and yet at the end were denied civil rights. With the enduring efforts of Civil Rights Leaders and the unconditional support of what some call the enlightened ones (Eleanor Roosevelt and Lt. Col. Noel Parrish), these men rose to become amongst the leaders of the young black aviators to rise as some of the greatest pilots to serve in WWII. On March 7th 1942 the first class of cadets received their wings and were declared ready for combat and placed on full alert.



Ghosted within the clouds of the painting Captain Davis, a strong task master, looks over the horizon upon the insurmountable challenges that were overcome by the men and women who became the "Legendary Red Tails". As the sunset rolls over the tops of the clouds, it echoes a new dawn in African American history. On March 24, 1945 General Ira Eaker asks Captain Davis if he was ready to stand up to the challenge of escorting heavy bombers into the heart of Berlin. Captain Davis embraced the opportunity and consequently their heroism and skill in flight became so legendary the bomber crews gave them the nickname "Red-Tail Angels". The mountain peaks break through the clouds as a group of B-25 bombers head to their target, the Daimler-Benz tank assembly plant, one of the most heavily protected targets of the Third Reich. Colonel Davis led fifty-nine P-51 fighters north towards Germany on a 1600 mile round-trip flight with grave concerns of limited fuel. Nevertheless, the pilots did not leave their side and escorted the bombers to their targets. As they approached Berlin they met a swarm of German Messerschmitt ME-109, 109e and thirty of the newest jet-fighter aircraft Me-262. Fighting eye to eye the Red Tails successfully defeated the Luftwaffe.

They were victorious in shooting down many German enemy pilots while safely escorting American Bomber squadrons to their I.P. (Initial Point of Run on Target), and safely back home. The Berlin mission earned them the Distinguished Unit Citation for outstanding performance of duty, and recognized not only their work in air combat but also the superior performance of the ground crew. The painting features Tuskegee airmen ghosted over the mountains looking down on the history they created. Colonel "Bo" Davis looks on with confidence, honor and pride knowing his men have proven to the world their place in history and have carved a path for future generations. Featured in the lower left are Tuskegee men and women working on the planes, representing a critical avenue towards maintaining the plane's flight readiness. During their service, the Tuskegee Airmen flew 1500 missions shooting down 112 enemy aircraft. A total of 450 pilots served; 66 were killed in action. At the end of the war, the Tuskegee Airmen were instrumental in implementing executive order 9981, banning segregation in the United States Military. Benjamin Davis became the first African American General to serve in the United States Air Force.

The painting captures the heart, spirit and sacrifices the Tuskegee men and women of Western Pennsylvania made to a now grateful nation.

"We helped African American people raise their heads and say, I can do it. Americas not perfect, but I'll hold her hand until she gets well".

— LT Col William H. Holloman III Pilot, 332nd Fighter Group

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