

109<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS  
2<sup>D</sup> SESSION

# H. R. 1259

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## AN ACT

To award a congressional gold medal on behalf of the Tuskegee Airmen, collectively, in recognition of their unique military record, which inspired revolutionary reform in the Armed Forces.

1        *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2        *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. FINDINGS.**

2 The Congress finds the following:

3 (1) In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt  
4 overruled his top generals and ordered the creation  
5 of an all Black flight training program. President  
6 Roosevelt took this action one day after the NAACP  
7 filed suit on behalf of Howard University student  
8 Yancy Williams and others in Federal court to force  
9 the Department of War to accept Black pilot train-  
10 ees. Yancy Williams had a civilian pilot's license and  
11 had earned an engineering degree. Years later,  
12 Major Yancy Williams participated in an air surveil-  
13 lance project created by President Dwight D. Eisen-  
14 hower.

15 (2) Due to the rigid system of racial segrega-  
16 tion that prevailed in the United States during  
17 World War II, Black military pilots were trained at  
18 a separate airfield built near Tuskegee, Alabama.  
19 They became known as the "Tuskegee Airmen".

20 (3) The Tuskegee Airmen inspired revolu-  
21 tionary reform in the Armed Forces, paving the way  
22 for full racial integration in the Armed Forces. They  
23 overcame the enormous challenges of prejudice and  
24 discrimination, succeeding, despite obstacles that  
25 threatened failure.

1           (4) From all accounts, the training of the  
2 Tuskegee Airmen was an experiment established to  
3 prove that so-called “coloreds” were incapable of op-  
4 erating expensive and complex combat aircraft.  
5 Studies commissioned by the Army War College be-  
6 tween 1924 and 1939 concluded that Blacks were  
7 unfit for leadership roles and incapable of aviation.  
8 Instead, the Tuskegee Airmen excelled.

9           (5) Overall, some 992 Black pilots graduated  
10 from the pilot training program of the Tuskegee  
11 Army Air Field, with the last class finishing in June  
12 1946, 450 of whom served in combat. The first class  
13 of cadets began in July 1941 with 13 airmen, all of  
14 whom had college degrees, some with Ph.D. degrees,  
15 and all of whom had pilot’s licenses. One of the  
16 graduates was Captain Benjamin O. Davis Jr., a  
17 United States Military Academy graduate. Four  
18 aviation cadets were commissioned as second lieuten-  
19 ants, and 5 received Army Air Corps silver pilot  
20 wings.

21           (6) That the experiment achieved success rather  
22 than the expected failure is further evidenced by the  
23 eventual promotion of 3 of these pioneers through  
24 the commissioned officer ranks to flag rank, includ-  
25 ing the late General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., United

1 States Air Force, the late General Daniel “Chappie”  
2 James, United States Air Force, our Nation’s first  
3 Black 4-star general, and Major General Lucius  
4 Theus, United States Air Force (retired).

5 (7) 450 Black fighter pilots under the command  
6 of then Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., fought in  
7 World War II aerial battles over North Africa, Sic-  
8 ily, and Europe, flying, in succession, P-40, P-39,  
9 P-47, and P-51 aircraft. These gallant men flew  
10 15,553 sorties and 1,578 missions with the 12th  
11 Tactical Air Force and the 15th Strategic Air Force.

12 (8) Colonel Davis later became the first Black  
13 flag officer of the United States Air Force, retired  
14 as a 3-star general, and was honored with a 4th star  
15 in retirement by President William J. Clinton.

16 (9) German pilots, who both feared and re-  
17 spected the Tuskegee Airmen, called them the  
18 “Schwartzte Vogelmenschen” (or “Black Birdmen”).  
19 White American bomber crews reverently referred to  
20 them as the “Black Redtail Angels”, because of the  
21 bright red painted on the tail assemblies of their  
22 fighter aircraft and because of their reputation for  
23 not losing bombers to enemy fighters as they pro-  
24 vided close escort for bombing missions over stra-  
25 tegic targets in Europe.

1           (10) The 99th Fighter Squadron, after having  
2 distinguished itself over North Africa, Sicily, and  
3 Italy, joined 3 other Black squadrons, the 100th, the  
4 301st, and the 302nd, designated as the 332nd  
5 Fighter Group. They then comprised the largest  
6 fighter unit in the 15th Air Force. From Italian  
7 bases, they destroyed many enemy targets on the  
8 ground and at sea, including a German destroyer in  
9 strafing attacks, and they destroyed numerous  
10 enemy aircraft in the air and on the ground.

11           (11) 66 of these pilots were killed in combat,  
12 while another 32 were either forced down or shot  
13 down and captured to become prisoners of war.  
14 These Black airmen came home with 150 Distin-  
15 guished Flying Crosses, Bronze Stars, Silver Stars,  
16 and Legions of Merit, one Presidential Unit Cita-  
17 tion, and the Red Star of Yugoslavia.

18           (12) Other Black pilots, navigators, bombard-  
19 iers and crewman who were trained for medium  
20 bombardment duty as the 477th Bomber Group  
21 (Medium) were joined by veterans of the 332nd  
22 Fighter Group to form the 477th Composite Group,  
23 flying the B-25 and P-47 aircraft. The demands of  
24 the members of the 477th Composite Group for par-  
25 ity in treatment and for recognition as competent

1 military professionals, combined with the magnifi-  
2 cent wartime records of the 99th Fighter Squadron  
3 and the 332nd Fighter Group, led to a review of the  
4 racial policies of the Department of War.

5 (13) In September 1947, the United States Air  
6 Force, as a separate service, reactivated the 332d  
7 Fighter Group under the Tactical Air command.  
8 Members of the 332d Fighter Group were “Top  
9 Guns” in the 1st annual Air Force Gunnery Meet in  
10 1949.

11 (14) For every Black pilot, there were 12 other  
12 civilian or military Black men and women per-  
13 forming ground support duties. Many of these men  
14 and women remained in the military service during  
15 the post-World War II era and spearheaded the inte-  
16 gration of the Armed Forces of the United States.

17 (15) Major achievements are attributed to  
18 many of those who returned to civilian life and  
19 earned leadership positions and respect as business-  
20 men, corporate executives, religious leaders, lawyers,  
21 doctors, educators, bankers, and political leaders.

22 (16) A period of nearly 30 years of anonymity  
23 for the Tuskegee Airmen was ended in 1972 with  
24 the founding of Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., in Detroit,  
25 Michigan. Organized as a non-military and nonprofit

1       entity, Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., exists primarily to  
2       motivate and inspire young Americans to become  
3       participants in our Nation's society and its demo-  
4       cratic process, and to preserve the history of their  
5       legacy.

6               (17) The Tuskegee Airmen have several memo-  
7       rials in place to perpetuate the memory of who they  
8       were and what they accomplished, including—

9                       (A) the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., National  
10       Scholarship Fund for high school seniors who  
11       excel in mathematics, but need financial assist-  
12       ance to begin a college program;

13                      (B) a museum in historic Fort Wayne in  
14       Detroit, Michigan;

15                      (C) Memorial Park at the Air Force Mu-  
16       seum at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in  
17       Dayton, Ohio;

18                      (D) a statue of a Tuskegee Airman in the  
19       Honor Park at the United States Air Force  
20       Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado; and

21                      (E) a National Historic Site at Moton  
22       Field, where primary flight training was per-  
23       formed under contract with the Tuskegee Insti-  
24       tute.

1 **SEC. 2. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

2 (a) AWARD AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of the  
3 House of Representatives and the President pro tempore  
4 of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements for the  
5 award, on behalf of the Congress, of a single gold medal  
6 of appropriate design in honor of the Tuskegee Airmen,  
7 collectively, in recognition of their unique military record,  
8 which inspired revolutionary reform in the Armed Forces.

9 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For the purposes of the  
10 award referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary of the  
11 Treasury (hereafter in this Act referred to as the “Sec-  
12 retary”) shall strike the gold medal with suitable emblems,  
13 devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the Sec-  
14 retary.

15 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

16 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the  
17 gold medal in honor of the Tuskegee Airmen under  
18 subsection (a), the gold medal shall be given to the  
19 Smithsonian Institution, where it will be displayed  
20 as appropriate and made available for research.

21 (2) SENSE OF THE CONGRESS.—It is the sense  
22 of the Congress that the Smithsonian Institution  
23 should make the gold medal received under para-  
24 graph (1) available for display elsewhere, particu-  
25 larly at other appropriate locations associated with  
26 the Tuskegee Airmen.

1 **SEC. 3. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

2 Under such regulations as the Secretary may pre-  
3 scribe, the Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in  
4 bronze of the gold medal struck under section 2, at a price  
5 sufficient to cover the costs of the medals, including labor,  
6 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

7 **SEC. 4. NATIONAL MEDALS.**

8 Medals struck pursuant to this Act are national med-  
9 als for purposes of chapter 51 of title 31, United States  
10 Code.

11 **SEC. 5. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS; PROCEEDS**  
12 **OF SALE.**

13 (a) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is  
14 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint  
15 Public Enterprise Fund, an amount not to exceed \$30,000  
16 to pay for the cost of the medals authorized under section  
17 2.

18 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the  
19 sale of duplicate bronze medals under section 3 shall be

1 deposited in the United States Mint Public Enterprise  
2 Fund.

Passed the House of Representatives February 28,  
2006.

Attest:

*Clerk.*

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