





# *The Red Tail of Courage*

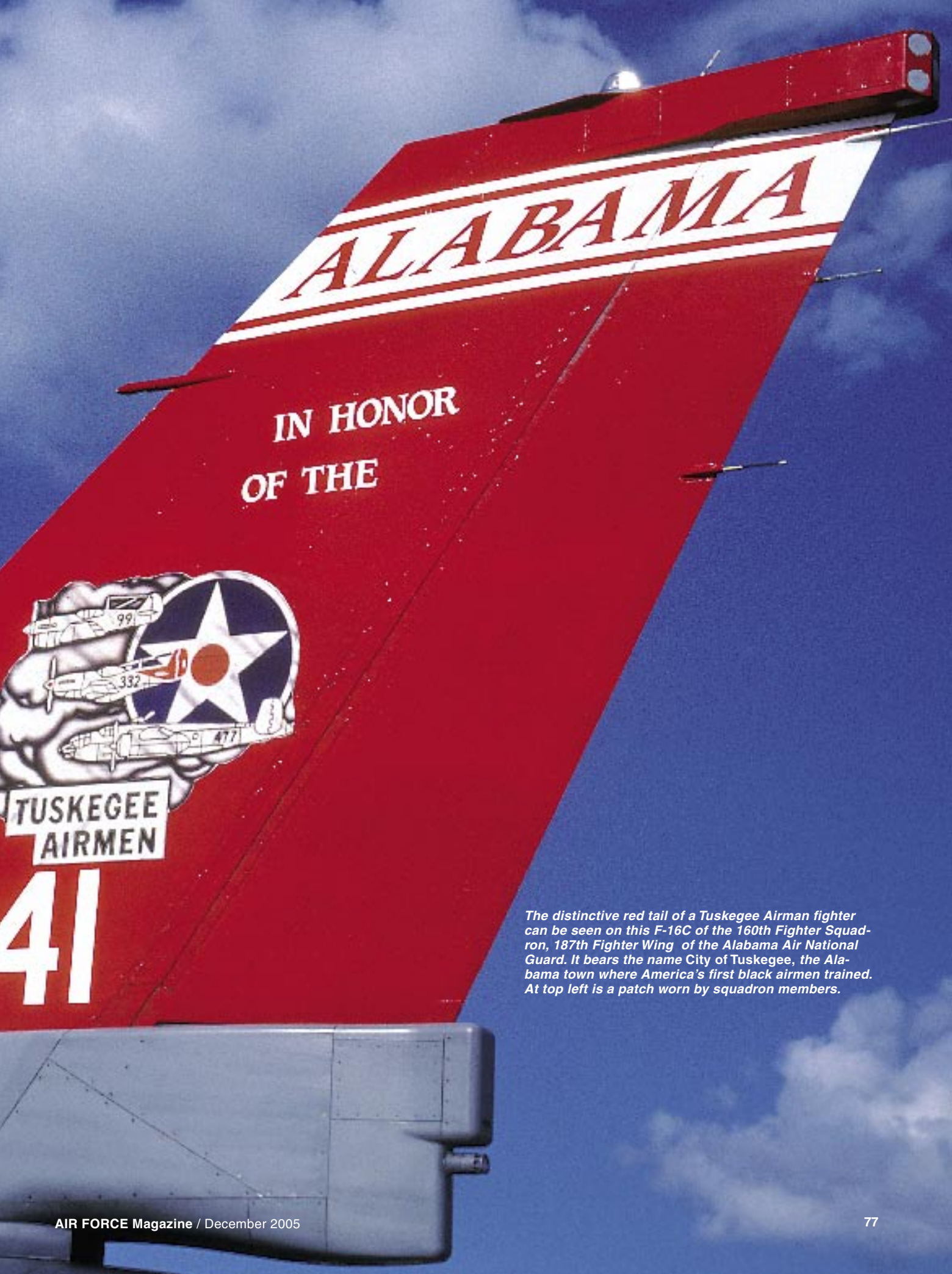
*The Alabama ANG pays homage to the Tuskegee Airmen,  
legendary African American pioneers of World War II.*

Photography by Greg L. Davis

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City of Tuskegee





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*The distinctive red tail of a Tuskegee Airman fighter can be seen on this F-16C of the 160th Fighter Squadron, 187th Fighter Wing of the Alabama Air National Guard. It bears the name City of Tuskegee, the Alabama town where America's first black airmen trained. At top left is a patch worn by squadron members.*



**T**he Tuskegee Airmen—America's first black military fliers—were pioneers against racial discrimination. In the 1940s, they underwent flight training at Tuskegee Army Air Field, Ala., to become part of the World War II Army Air Forces. Though these African American airmen flew bombers and several types of fighters, only their P-51C Mustangs sported the famous red tails.

The idea of reviving the red-tail paint scheme came from Col. Stanley Clarke, the 187th Fighter Wing commander. He acted after learning of an impending visit by Lt. Gen. Daniel James III, the Air National Guard director and son of the late Gen. Daniel "Chappie" James Jr., a Tuskegee Airman. The Alabama Guard wing got the blessing of the Tuskegee Airmen organization and proceeded.

In the 1968 photo at right, then-Colonel James pins second lieutenant bars on his son.



USAF photo

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At left, members of the 332nd Fighter Group take a pre-mission briefing inside an operations room in Italy. The first Tuskegee aviation cadet class emerged from training in March 1942. Five members successfully completed the course and received silver pilot wings. By 1946, a total of 992 graduates had received commissions and wings. About half served overseas in the 332nd Fighter Group or the 99th Fighter Squadron (which in 1944 transferred to 332nd control). The outstanding record of black airmen during World War II was an important factor in the push for racial equality in America.

Right, 1st Lt. Nick Hare, a pilot of the 160th FS, reviews maintenance forms with SrA. John Green, the aircraft's crew chief, before taking off on a training mission. Far right, the red-tailed F-16C rolls during the training exercise over Alabama.

The 187th FW, based at Dannelly Field in Montgomery, flies Block 30 F-16C fighters. The unit's members have been called on in the last few years to take part in Operation Noble Eagle, the post-Sept. 11, 2001, combat air patrol missions over US cities, and twice to support military operations in Iraq. The wing became the first US unit to employ in combat the new GBU-38, a GPS-guided 500-pound bomb. It was used in the November 2004 battle of Fallujah in Iraq.

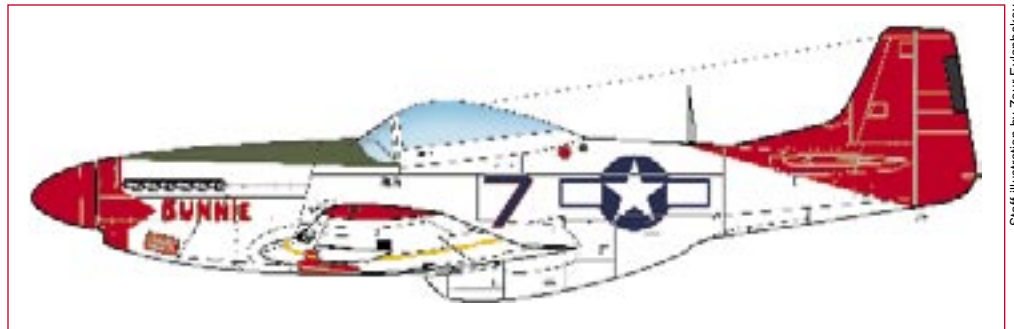


Photos by Greg L. Davis



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Above left, the pilot releases a flare as City of Tuskegee goes vertical over Alabama while, above right, the F-16C heads downward during a loop. Drawing at right depicts the red-tailed P-51D of Capt. Roscoe Brown, a Tuskegee Airman of the 332nd. Brown shot down two German aircraft, including (on March 24, 1945) an Me-262.



Staff illustration by Zaur Eyanbekov



The photo at left captures City of Tuskegee seconds before landing at Dannelly Field.

Each aircraft of the 187th Fighter Wing bears the name of a major city or town within the state of Alabama. It is the only unit in the Total Air Force to follow this practice.



At right, three munitions team members—(l-r) SrA. Carnel Jenkins, TSgt. Steven Root, and SrA. Dustin Wester—carry an AIM-9 Sidewinder weapon toward the waiting F-16, helping to configure it for its next training mission. The entire 187th team carries out a challenging training regimen each year.



USAF photo



In photo at far left, World War II pilot Andrew Turner and another unidentified Tuskegee Airman are pictured with the Mustang called Skipper's Darlin' III. African American pilots such as these fought in the air war over North Africa, Europe, and the Mediterranean, losing not a single bomber to enemy action during more than 2,000 escort missions. They destroyed 111 German airplanes in the air and some 150 on the ground. Sixty-six Tuskegee Airmen were killed in action or in accidents, while 32 were taken prisoner.

Left, SSgt. Anthony Broome, crew chief, and Amn. Miles Watkins, assistant crew chief, observe from behind as City of Tuskegee runs its engine in a preflight check. Below, vapor streams from the wings of the F-16C as its pilot pulls hard to acquire a target.



Above, TSgt. Ryan Blankenship (l) and SMSgt. Wesley Apperson found paint. The serial number was changed from tactical grey to white. The markings were completed with the addition of specially made Tuskegee Airmen decals.





Top, the Red Tail F-16 flies in formation with an ANG KC-135R. Above, City of Tuskegee and friend roll toward a target during a recent exercise. Above right, three fighters prepare to refuel.

At right, four Tuskegee Airmen return to a war zone—Balad Air Base in Iraq. Capt. Mark Ferstl (l) shows a UAS ground control station to retired Lt. Col. Lee Archer (sitting), retired Lt. Col Robert Ashby (back left), and retired Col. Dick Toliver (leaning on chair back). An unidentified Tuskegee Airman sits at far left. In October, they made a fact-finding trip to the 332nd Expeditionary Operations Group—descendent of the unit the Tuskegee Airmen formed in 1941. Said the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing commander, Brig. Gen. Frank Gorenc: “For the Tuskegee Airmen, the legacy continues in the air and on the ground.” ■

