



# BIOGRAPHY

## A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

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### 1ST LT ALPHONSO SIMMONS



Alphonso Simmons

Alphonso Simmons was born in Ocilla, Georgia, on March 25, 1919. He was the youngest of eight children of John and Rosa Anna (Powell) Simmons. The family moved to Jacksonville, Florida when he was quite young. He graduated from Stanton High School in Jacksonville, FL. The school dated back to the 1860s which was the first school for Black students in the state of Florida. Alphonso Simmons served as a Scout Master of Troop 53 in Jacksonville. He initially became a Scout in 1937. There are some articles that state that he also attended the Art Institute of Chicago. Additional education is unknown by the family.

Alphonso Simmons registered for the WWII draft on October 16, 1940, at the age of 21. At the time he was employed with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) as a Teacher at the Negro Art Center in Jacksonville, FL. A year later, he was employed as a Teacher at the Clara White Mission in Jacksonville. When he initially applied for the Army Air Corps, he was denied due to the years of college requirements. When authorities learned he had been a Scout Master and had received significant Scout training, they allowed him to take the Army Air Corps Entrance Exam—and he passed.



Scout Master Simmons enrolled in the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) in Tuskegee, AL and was awarded his Silver Wings as a Second Lieutenant on October 1, 1943. LT Simmons graduated in Class 43-I-SE and was assigned to the 100th Fighter Squadron. His class graduated 20-Cadets and he was one of the highest ranking of his classmates. LT Simmons deployed to Italy with the 100th Fighter Squadron in December 1943. He participated in several missions. LT Simmons was reported missing on a flight mission on August 9, 1944. He was on an Escort mission for B-17 Bomber aircrafts to Gyor, Hungary. He was in his P-51C Mustang and was forced to parachute from his plane. It was reported in the military report that the Escort Fighter Planes were flying in formation at 24,000 feet and LT Simmons' plane was seen dropping fast. At least one other Tuskegee Airmen looked for him for 20-minutes with no signs of him, a parachute, aircraft, or fire explosion. LT Simmons had bailed out of his damaged plane and was captured by Yugoslav Partisans, a communist resistance group near Krupa, Yugoslavia. He spent approximately 30 days uninjured in this Camp with the Partisans before he was returned back to the base in Ramitelli, Italy in a hospital plane. A news article in the New Journal and Guide in Norfolk, VA, on September 23, 1944, stated that LT Simmons modestly admitted that he became sort of a Commanding Officer to the Americans who were at the Camp. In the newspaper, LT Simmons was quoted as saying "he influenced the things that went on there to a certain degree." LT Simmons reported very good treatment while he was at the Partisan Camp. He and other Tuskegee Airmen Fighter Pilots and Bomber Crew that had been captured worked with the Partisans while they were at the Camp.



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CLASS 43I, The last full single engine class. TOP: W. N. Albrook, W. N. Morgan, A. Simmons, C. B. Pender. C.L.: Browder, N.V. Nelson, E. W. Watkins, and H. B. Scott. MIDDLE: C. B. Brown, E. L. Jones, N.W. Scales, C.W. Newman, M.A. Harris, C.F. Nley, P.G. Goodenough, and G.M. Rhodes. BOTTOM: R.H. Smith, W.D. Ross, C.N. Langston, C.E. Johnson, G.J. Haley, William Cross, C.B. Johnson.

LT Simmons' final mission was on March 3, 1945. He and seven other Pilots were sent to strafe railroads in Austria. LT Simmons was piloting a P-51D Mustang named "Gripper Dan" on that day. "He was quoted as saying "We flew over this airfield where there was no opposition." Fellow Tuskegee Airmen Pilot, LT Robert L. Martin said in a 2008 interview at Pritzker Military Library in Chicago, IL., that "We saw two airplanes parked a little bit off the field, and we said "We'll get more credit for destroying two airplanes than shooting up a train. We went in to shoot up those planes." LTs Simmons and Martin's Fighter Aircrafts were hit by anti-aircraft fire as they flew over the airfield destroying the two parked airplanes. LT Martin was able to bail out of his plane with his parachute. Unfortunately, LT Simmons was not able to bail out and was killed in Austria. LT Simmons' body was located, and he is buried at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery and Memorial in Nettuno, Italy.



Posthumous Honors For Fallen Airman

According to a government database, LT Simmons was awarded an Air Medal with four oak Leaf clusters and a Purple Heart posthumously for his military service. His Parents accepted the honors in a special ceremony in Jacksonville, FL in May 1946. In April 2024, LT Simmons was honored in FL legislation with his name listed in FL HB-1227 - Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day. This Bill designates the fourth Thursday in March as an Annual State Holiday to commemorate the Tuskegee Airmen.

