

BIOGRAPHY

A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

TUSKEGEE AIRMEN INC. PUBLIC RELATIONS, P.O. Box 830060
TUSKEGEE, AL 36083

REV. THOMAS N. BRISTOW, SR.



Reverend Thomas Bristow was born Sept. 3, 1928 in Newport News, Virginia. "As a lad, I loved to be around planes," he said. I would hang out at the airfield near Newport News. It was a joy to see the pilots' takeoff and fly."

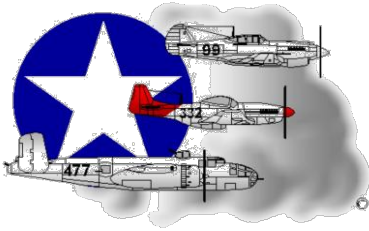
Bristow remembers the attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. Every male was called in for military service," he said. I got a warehouse job at Camp Patrick Henry. One of my favorite memories is riding back to the Motor Pool in a jeep and driving the jeep back to the warehouse. At the warehouse my job was to service mosquito nets and prepping helmet lines for the Blacks going overseas."

Bristow also served as an Air Raid Warden prior to joining the military. His job was to ensure that when the siren went off, all shades were pulled down and no lights could be seen from any homes. "All car lights had to be painted half black, he said. This was done to ensure that if we were attacked by the enemy there would be no reflection of lights in the area to give away the location of buildings."

Those experiences inspired me to join the military. When I was 17 years of age, I enlisted and told the recruiters I was 18. Bristow did his basic training at Sheppard Field, Texas in 1946. He continued his job training at Chanute Field, Illinois where he was trained as an Aircraft Sheet Metal Specialist. After graduation, he was assigned to the 477th Bombardment Group.

I enjoyed everything about training," said Bristow. It was all new to me. I remember intentionally washing out of my training class because I wanted to go home. My First Sergeant was an African-American who pulled me aside and convinced me that I was throwing away a great opportunity. This is an excellent opportunity for a young Black boy,' he said. The government is paying for everything.





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Bristow returned to the School and asked to be accepted back into the program. He was told that if there was one low mark he would be kicked out. Bristow succeeded in passing the Sheet Metal Specialist Class and continued his military career until his discharge from active duty after World War II.

Bristow was recalled to military service during the start of the Korean War. "If you didn't have any overseas duty in your military record you would be assigned to go to Japan in preparation for an assignment in Korea," he said. I did not have to go because I had less than six months to serve. When I told this to my superiors, they discovered I had only five months and some days left for duty.

Later in the 1960s, Bristow was called into the Ministry. "In July 1962, I preached my first sermon," he said. Prior to that, my wife was already a Christian when I wasn't. I thank God that she waited for him to straighten my life out.

