



BIOGRAPHY

A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

Tuskegee Airmen Inc. Public Relations, P.O. Box 830060
Tuskegee, AL 36083

Mr. Wilfred R. DeFour



Wilfred R. DeFour was born on October 13, 1918 in Colon, Panama to Trinidadian parents, Emanuel and Saverine DeFour. He was the youngest of 4-children (Ivy, Muriel, and George), who all preceded him in death. After his father sold his tailor shop in Panama, Wilfred and his siblings were brought to this country at a very early age by their parents. The family settled in Harlem, where his father opened a tailor shop. Wilfred was a product of the NYC public school system: elementary school, Dewitt Clinton High School, and The City College of New York (pre-war). Post war, he earned an Associate's Degree in Real Estate and Insurance Brokerage (1947) from Pace Institute (now Pace University) and a BBA from the New York University School of Commerce (1954).

On July 17, 1943, Wilfred married the love of his life Ruth C. Christian, of St. Croix, US Virgin Islands, while on military leave. To this union were born two children: Wilfred, Jr. (lovingly known as Reggie, now deceased) and Darlene Consuelo. Wilfred and Ruth were avid world travelers and were married 61 years, until her death in 2005. They raised their children in Harlem's historic Riverton Development, where they were amid the original residents.

Wilfred was inducted in the military in February 1942 and processed at Fort Dix, New Jersey, where he was assigned to the Army Air Corps (now The United States Air Force). He was sent to the Tuskegee Army Air Field, Tuskegee, Alabama and was among those in the original "Tent City" because the barracks, runways and airfield had not [yet] been built. After basic training, he was assigned to the 366th Air Service Squadron, an element of the then forming 96th Air Service Group (a team of highly trained aircraft technicians). He applied to be a Pilot and passed all of the required examinations for the Pilots' Cadet School but, unfortunately, he didn't pass the standard eye test.

In January 1943, Wilfred was selected to attend the Army Administration School on the campus of Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia, where he received his Army Administration training. Upon graduation [at the top of his class], he was promoted to Staff Sergeant and was retained as an Instructor. He was also assigned duties relevant to cadre build up. Subsequently, he became restless and asked to be relieved of those duties in order to rejoin his unit, realizing that they were getting ready for deployment overseas.

Places of assignment-State side: Tuskegee Army Airfield, Tuskegee, Alabama; Selfridge Field, Oscoda, Michigan; and, Alpena (promoted to Technical Sergeant, assigned to the Engineering Office, 366th Air Service Squadron, as the Administrative NCO).

Places of assignment-Overseas: Italy: Monte Corvine, Foggia, Capodichino, Ramatelli, San Pietro, and Banolia. He returned to the States aboard the Air Craft Carrier S.S. Randolph. He was awarded the following Military Service Medals: Good Conduct Medal, WWII Victory Medal, American Service Medal, and the European African Middle Eastern Service Medal. He was honorably discharged on December 6, 1945.

From 1945-1949, Wilfred was employed by the Veterans Administration (in the Insurance Division) and then in 1949 began his career in the U.S. Postal Service. Throughout his tenure, his leadership and administrative skills were recognized and was intermittently promoted and ascended to the position of Superintendent of Special Delivery and Parcel Post of the New York Post Office. He held this top executive position until his retirement in December 1982.

On April 11, 2006, President George W. Bush signed a Bill into law to award *all* Documented Original Tuskegee Airmen the 'United States Congressional Gold Medal of Honor,' it was awarded on Thursday, March 29, 2007, in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda in Washington, D.C. U.S. Senator Carl Levin and Congressman Charles B. Rangel were chief congressional

champions in the House of Representatives and the U. S. Senate to get the medal awarded to the members of the Tuskegee Experience.

Wilfred enjoyed the camaraderie of his fellow airmen and being among this unique, talented, intelligent and competitive brothers and sisters, who looked just like him; it was rewarding. Little did he know then that this 'band of brothers and sisters' would live on in history. In his words: "We didn't know we were creating history; we were just doing our jobs." He took pride in being an ambassador of goodwill and doing presentations at schools and corporations on behalf of the Claude B. Govan Tri-State Chapter, TAI. He shared the history of the Airmen - giving an account of his personal experience - and encouraging students to get their education and be the very best they can be in this world.

Wilfred loved Harlem, starting with his early days of playing stickball in its streets, swimming at the Harlem YMCA, to his years in real estate brokerage. As a real estate broker, he partnered with his elder brother George Emanuel DeFour (now deceased) as Founders of Saverin Realty Co., which was incorporated in 1974 to serve the Harlem Community. Wilfred assisted countless Harlem residents to realize the dream of home ownership. He was a member of Euclid Lodge #70 of Prince Hall Free and Accepted Masons, New York; the Treasurer of the Greater Harlem Real Estate Board (for 10 years); and Treasurer of the Claude B. Govan Tri-State Chapter, Tuskegee Airmen Incorporated, for many years.

Well into his 90's, Mr. DeFour drove his fellow Tuskegee Airmen to the Claude B. Govan Tri-State Chapter, Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. meetings, until his daughter took away his keys! He loved music, especially opera, classical, jazz and, of course, calypso. He was an audiophile, who would go to the old listening rooms to check out the most recent stereo equipment. He would listen to classical music - at high volume - until his family finally made him get headphones! He also was a lover of photography. While in the Army Air Corps he had access to all of the supplies necessary to develop pictures, because of his job in the engineering office. He turned a latrine into *a darkroom* so that he could develop his own pictures; until told that this was '*out of order.*'

Among his many life accomplishments, he [along with his fellow Documented Original Tuskegee Airmen] received a personal invitation to attend the Inauguration of President Barack H. Obama in both Election years – 2008 and 2012. Then, in January 2012 (along with 17 other DOTAs), he was invited to the White House to view the movie "Red Tails" in the White House theatre with President Obama and the First Lady. The President personally presented each Airman with a Presidential Coin.

On Saturday, December 8, 2018 (in the early morning), Mr. Wilfred DeFour joined TAI's Lonely Eagle Chapter. Mr. DeFour was a man who enjoyed life; always the consummate gentleman; community activist; and always ready to assist others. He will be missed by *ALL* who witnessed him walking upright with pride at 100 years of age!!

To learn more about Mr. Wilfred DeFour, other Documented Original Tuskegee Airmen, please visit the Website at the following location: www.TuskegeeAirmen.org.

