

BIOGRAPHY

A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

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

CURTIS C. ROBINSON



Curtis Christopher Robinson was born in Orangeburg, South Carolina, on August 25, 1919. He grew up in a family that expected him to work hard and get a college education. His grandfather, Thomas Robinson, a former slave, was a college graduate, teacher, farmer, landowner, and postmaster of Bamberg County, South Carolina. Thomas's accomplishments at that time were remarkable because he thrived in a system that prohibited African Americans from obtaining meaningful employment or owning land or getting an education. In retaliation for his successes, an angry white mob burned his home.

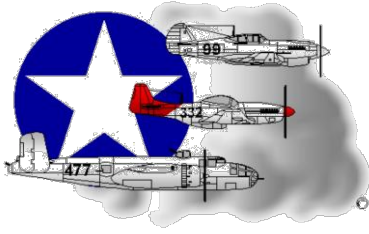
After Thomas gave up his job as a postmaster, he became a minister and preached in Bamberg and Orangeburg.

Christopher Robinson, Curtis's father, was a college graduate, teacher, and house painter. Like his father, Christopher worked hard and expected his children to do the same. The jobs Curtis held in his youth gave him a strong work ethic and served him in adulthood. In 1936, Curtis enrolled at Clafin College, Orangeburg, SC., where many of his family members attended. At Clafin, Curtis wanted to be a Doctor, but a course in comparative anatomy changed his mind. In this class, the students dissected and examined the organs of cats and rabbits. It turned his stomach, and he could not stand the smell, and he decided to change his major.

After graduation in 1940, Robinson taught high school in Spartanburg County, SC. He taught Math, General Science, History, and Geography. As the military began to draft blacks, Robinson toured Camp Penn, an Army camp in Spartanburg County. There he saw Black Soldiers performing menial tasks that were not part of basic training. Also, he heard the soldiers referring to a White Lieutenant as "Captain Boss." This agitated Robinson, so he decided to choose his career.

Since three of his brothers were already serving and seeing the deplorable working conditions, he decided to complete the application to enter the Tuskegee program. A year later, Robinson received his acceptance letter, joined the Army Air Force at Shaw Field, Sumter SC and in August 1942, he began pilot training at the Tuskegee airfield. There his classmates teased him about coming from a small school; the teasing inspired him to succeed.





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Cadet Robinson graduated in 1943, as a member of class 43D, single-engine. 2nd Lieutenant Robinson joined the 99th Fighter Squadron in the Southern Theatre, flying the P40 Warhawk doing bombing and strafing missions. Perhaps his most memorable sortie was the one in which he forgot to change his fuel switch from the external tank to the primary tank. It was a standard operating procedure for fighter pilots to drop their auxiliary tanks before engaging the enemy in aerial combat. After Lt. Robinson forgot to flip the switch after dropping his external tank, the P40's engine flamed out. By the time Lt. Robinson corrected his mistake, and the engine restarted, the German ME 109s were gone.

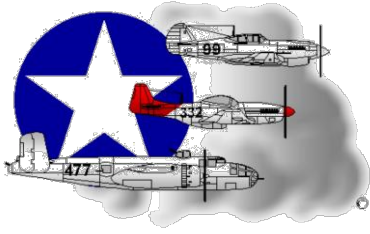
A career-changing incident happened to Lt. Robinson after his flight arrived at a Ramitelli airbase following an extended mission. Ramitelli was a new Air Base, and there were no barracks for the Pilots. All incoming Pilots had to clear a spot in a nearby wheat field to put their tents. They used hoes and shovels. Lt. Robinson and Lt. Leonard Jackson decided to burn a place to put their tents instead of clearing out a site. They started a fire using Aviation Fuel, and just when the fire started, the wind picked up, and the fire got away. While fighting the fire, Robinson passed out from breathing in the smoke.

Lt. Robinson woke up in a private hospital near the base. He and several other patients had to sleep in the basement with half an inch of water on the floor with wooden planks to walk on. During his stay, he developed pneumonia. On a follow-up exam, the doctors discovered he had hypertension. The Air Corps decided to send him home to be an Instructor Pilot.

In 1944, Robinson attended the first Black Instructor Pilot course at Tuskegee. As an Instructor, he taught cadets how to fly at night using instruments, how to navigate in bad weather, and how to fly cross country. In 1946, he transferred with the 332nd to Lockbourne Air Base under the command of Colonel Benjamin O. Davis Jr. There, his job was Acting Base Technical Inspector. He held this position until his discharge in 1947.

After his discharge, his priorities were to find a job and a place to live. The Robinson's decided to settle in Washington DC, where they thought provided a better opportunity than South Carolina. With his flying experience and love for flying, he felt that a job in aviation was the right fit. One day, he and Clinton Mills, another Tuskegee Pilot, went to National Airport to apply for a job at Eastern Airlines. They were told by a receptionist that "Eastern does not give out applications to Blacks!" For a short time, Robinson worked for the





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National Security Agency. After his self-assessment, he decided there was no opportunity for him in the NSA and decided to go into Pharmacy.

He applied to Howard University's School of Pharmacy, and the school accepted him in 1948. He went to school under the GI Bill of Rights, which paid for five years of education for his five years of service during the war. He graduated from Howard in 1952. Later, he stated, "the GI Bill was the most significant Affirmative Action Act ever." During his pharmacy career, Mr. Robinson owned 6-Pharmacies and a Medical Appliance Store in DC.

Over the years, Curtis Robinson received several awards, including the 2004 Bowl of Hygeia Award. This award recognizes Pharmacists who possess outstanding records of civic leadership in their communities and encourages Pharmacists to take active roles in their communities. He also received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Howard University School of Pharmacy and an induction into the Claflin's University Hall of Fame. He was the 1st Treasurer of Tuskegee Airmen Inc., and he met President Bush in 2005. In 2005, author George Norfleet wrote a book about him called *A Pilot's Journey, Memoirs of a Tuskegee Airman Curtis Christopher Robinson*.

At the age of 90 years old, Curtis Christopher Robinson joined the Lonely Eagles on October 12, 2009.

