



BIOGRAPHY

A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

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LT. COL. LEO R. GRAY

“The Tuskegee Airmen are a classic example of overcoming adversity, and people in our country should know about it.”

~Tuskegee Airman Lt. Col. Leo R. Gray



Lieutenant Colonel Gray was born May 30, 1924, in Boston Massachusetts. As a youth in the Boy Scouts of America, Gray met all qualifications for a Life Scout and achieved the rank of Junior Assistant Scoutmaster in his Troop. After graduation from Boston English High School in 1942, Gray enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corp as a Private. After completing the College Training Detachment Program at Tuskegee Institute, he entered Aviation Cadet Training to become a Pilot. He graduated from the Tuskegee Army Air Field Flying School as a 2nd Lieutenant Single Engine Pilot in Class 44-G (SE). After completing Combat Fighter Pilot Training at Walterboro Army Air Field, Gray was stationed in Italy as a Fighter Pilot with the 100th Fighter Squadron, 332nd Fighter Group. He flew 15 combat missions over Europe in P-51 Mustangs. He had a total of 750 hours flying time. He was separated from active duty in 1946 and remained in the USAF Reserve until he retired in 1984. During his 41 years of military service, Lt. Col. Gray was awarded the Air Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster, a Presidential Unit Citation, and the Mediterranean Theatre of Operation ribbon with three battle stars. In addition, he earned the American Theatre and World War II Victory button.

After the war, he went to college on the GI Bill Gray. He earned a Bachelor's Degree from the University of Massachusetts in 1950, a Master's Degree from the University of Nebraska in 1952, and he completed some post graduate work at the University of Maryland from 1962- 1964. He was often the unsung “first Black” to do this or that in the early days of his career, before the civil rights legislation of the 1960s. Gray wore many hats in his US Department of Agriculture career. He served as an agricultural economist with the Economic Research Service, an economist with APHIS in California, and as Director, Program Planning Office of the Food Safety & Inspection Service to mention a few. In addition, he was an economic consultant to USAID in West Africa.

His professional and civic life reflected his deep commitments to the Tuskegee Airmen, to agricultural economic research organizations, and to civil rights. He was a member of the Tuskegee Airmen Inc, and in 1991 became Founder and President of the Miami Chapter. He helped to form a new chapter in Walterboro, South Carolina, the location of advanced combat training for Tuskegee-trained pilots before they were shipped overseas to combat from 1943 to 1945. He was the Past President, Vice President and Treasurer of the East Coast Chapter of Tuskegee Airmen. His particular passion was to motivate and empower youth to seek careers in Aviation and Aerospace. He used the story of the Tuskegee Airmen to demonstrate the need for preparedness and excellence, belief in oneself, and perseverance. Gray took delight in young adults coming up to him to tell how he had impressed them as a youth to pursue aviation and/or military careers, or even just to bring their grades up. He considered hearing their feedback to be one of the joyous benefits of living a long life. He was also gratified to have inspired

numerous adults to spread the Tuskegee Airmen story and use it in their work with young people. He was also a dedicated member of the Boys & Girls Club of America – of which he was a member himself in his youth – and was a co-founder of the organization’s Ionosphere Club in Broward County, Florida, which gives members the opportunity to learn about all aspects of flying, including science and mechanics.



He was the Founder and Past President of the Forum on Blacks in Agriculture, the Past President of Good Hope East Civic Association in Silver Springs, MD, and a former member of the Richmond, California, Model Neighborhood Citizens Board. Other memberships included the Air Force Association, The Retired Officers Association, the NAACP, the Gulfstream Chapter AMMV, the Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale Museum, and several more organizations.

“There are many young people, especially in urban areas, who have not been exposed to Aviation. They need to understand what’s available for them. Aviation is a field with many openings. Pilots and support personnel are in demand because of many retirements. People need to understand the impact that aviation has on different areas of the country.”

~ Lt. Col. Leo Gray

Military education includes: Enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps as a private, May, 1943; Graduated August, 1944 from Tuskegee Army Air Field Flying School as a 2nd Lieutenant, Single Engine Pilot; Served in Italy as a fighter pilot with the 100th Fighter Squadron, 332nd Fighter Group, later to be known as the Tuskegee Airmen; flew 15 missions before the war ended; Accumulated 750 hours flying time, total; Remained in USAF Reserve until 1984, completing 41 years military service

Civilian education includes: 1942 Graduated from Boston English High School, an all-boys school, and the first public high school in the United States; 1950 Earned a Bachelor of Science Degree from the University of Massachusetts; 1952 Earned a Master of Arts Degree from the University of Nebraska, where he was inducted into the Gamma Sigma Delta National Agricultural Honor Society; 1962 – 1964 Did post-graduate work at the University of Maryland; Participated in ongoing professional development as appropriate during lengthy civilian and military careers; Completed the following progression of courses as a member of the United States Power Squadron, a nationwide recreational boating organization: America’s Boating Course (ABC), Seamanship, Piloting, Advanced Piloting, Engine Maintenance, Weather, Sail; Trained for Search and Rescue, as a member of the Fort Lauderdale Composite Squadron, Civil Air Patrol

Military awards include: Air Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster, a Presidential Unit Citation, the Mediterranean Theatre of Operation Ribbon with three battle stars, the American Theatre and World War II Victory button, Bronze Replica of the Congressional Gold Medal

Civic awards and honors include: 1998 Honored by USDA-NRCS in Florida; 2006 Who’s Who 100 Top Industry Experts; 2006 Honorary Doctor of Public Service from Tuskegee University; 2007 Congressional Gold Medal from President George Bush to Tuskegee Airmen; 2007 Named a Paul Harris Fellow by Rotary Foundation of Rotary International; 2007 Leo R. Gray and Tuskegee Airmen Day, City of Anchorage, AK; Leo R. Gray Day, City of Dania Beach; Leo R. Gray Day, City of Fort Lauderdale; 2012 Lt Col Leo R. Gray Appreciation Day, Broward County Commission; 2015 Key to Miami-Dade County

Campaigns /Wars: WWII, 100th Fighter Squadron of the 332nd Fighter Group

Civic Activities and Contributions: Civil Air Patrol (CAP) – Active member from 1997 to 2006 – served as Public Affairs Officer of the Fort Lauderdale Composite Squadron. Maintained membership even while inactive and enthusiastically recommended and referred youth and their parents to join; Active in Fort Lauderdale Power Squadron – participated in local boat shows to educate the public about boating safety; participated in annual waterway clean-ups; attended meetings regularly and took part in other Squadron activities both on land and on the water; Lifetime member and Board member of the Nan Knox Boys and Girls Club – Envisioned and co founded the Ionosphere Club of Flight at that club in downtown Fort Lauderdale, FL. Frequently attended to motivate, inspire and mentor the young people there; Supported the United Negro College Fund of South Florida; Gave educational and motivational talks throughout the year, for many, many years to countless public and private school students from elementary to college level in Broward, Miami-Dade and Palm Beach Counties, Florida, as well as by invitation around the country; Gave educational and motivational talks to adults at many churches, civic groups, governmental groups, hobby groups, thus inspiring many adults to pick up and carry on his work.

Lonely Eagles Chapter: Lt. Col. Leo Gray passed away September 23, 2016

