

BIOGRAPHY

A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

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1ST LT CHARLES P. BAILEY



1st LT Charles Phillip Bailey was born November 25, 1918, in Punta Gorda, FL to Archie and Josephine M. (McIntear) Bailey. LT Bailey was one of nine children born to his parents. He was the fourth born and third son. There were seven boys and two girls. His family and close friends called him “Phillip.” As a young boy, he delivered newspapers in his hometown.

LT Bailey attended Baker Academy for elementary and middle school. His hometown of Punta Gorda, Florida, did not have a high school for African American children. He moved to stay with his maternal cousins in Ocala, Florida to attend Howard Academy, an all-Black high school. Ocala was three hours away from his hometown. LT Bailey excelled in academics at Howard Academy and was a great student. He also was very good at playing football. After high school, he enrolled in Bethune-Cookman College, now Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona Beach, FL. While there, he played football on a full scholarship. LT Bailey’s goal was not to play professional football; he wanted to be a Pilot. Bethune-Cookman did not have a Pilot Training Program. One historical black college in Alabama, Tuskegee Institute, had just begun a Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP). Dr. Mary McCleod Bethune, founder of Bethune-Cookman College, was made aware of his aspirations. With her advocacy for blacks to have roles that were more meaningful in the military along with her close connection and friendship with First Lady of the United States, Eleanor Roosevelt, Dr. Bethune arranged for LT Bailey to transfer from Bethune-Cookman to Tuskegee Institute. Dr. Bethune helped him financially while he was in College. He became like a son to her. LT Bailey had a very endearing relationship with Dr. Bethune throughout her entire life.



In August 1942 while still in College, LT Bailey enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corp for Pilot training. On April 29, 1943, he completed his training and earned his Silver Pilot Wings becoming a 2nd Lieutenant. He graduated in Class 43-D-SE. LT Bailey was assigned to the 99th Fighter Squadron and the 332nd Fighter Group. He was the first Floridian to be assigned to the 99th Fighter Squadron and the first to be in combat. In the fall of 1943, LT Bailey went to North Africa as a Combat Fighter Pilot. He later flew missions in Central Europe, Germany, Italy, France, and the Rhineland. He flew 133 missions while in the military. He flew planes that he dearly loved. He flew the P-40 Warhawk that he named “Josephine” after his beloved mother. He also flew the famous P-51 Mustang



1st Lt. Bailey posing with his P-40, "Josephine" named for his mother. Note that the aircraft is armed with cluster bombs strapped to a 500 lb for tactical ground support mission. These missions rarely afforded the 99th an opportunity to engage with enemy aircraft.



that he named “My Buddy,” in honor of his father that he had always called his buddy. During LT Bailey’s military career, he shot down his first German Fw-190 on January 27, 1944, in his P-40 Warhawk. He shot down his second German Fw-190 on July 18, 1944, in his P-51 Mustang. Most of his missions were combat Fighter Pilot Bomber Escort missions. He served in the 12th Air Force first, and later in the 15th Air Force. On one of his missions over the Mediterranean, shrapnel hit him. It struck him near his heart. His saving grace was a small bible that he kept in his flight jacket pocket. The bible saved his life!



After leaving the military, LT Bailey returned to Central Florida and completed his degree at Bethune -Cookman College. He earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary Education. He taught school in Volusia and Seminole County for many years. Later, he went back to school, studied mortuary science at the Cincinnati College of Embalming and became a Funeral Director. He opened the Charles P. Bailey Funeral Home in Deland, FL serving this community for decades.



Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune introduced LT Bailey to his future wife. Bessie Fitch was from Washington, D.C. Bessie had worked as an Executive Secretary at Bethune-Cookman College and a personal secretary to Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune. Dr. Bethune arranged for LT Bailey and Bessie to meet and the rest is history. LT Bailey and Bessie Fitch married in 1946 and were married for over 50 years. To this union, two sons were born, Charles, Jr. and James Bailey. Dr. Bethune was godmother to Charles, Jr. Dr. Bethune was slated to be godmother to James in 1955. She died before James was born that year.

LT Bailey came from a very accomplished military family. He, along with his six brothers, bravely served their country in the military. Six of them served in World War II with one brother also serving in Korea. LT Bailey served in the USAAF, two brothers served in the Army, two brothers served in the Navy and one brother served in the Marines; all of whom served during World War II. All seven brothers were known in their hometown as the “Fighting Bailey Brothers.” The oldest brother, Maurice, was an Army Staff Sergeant and participated in the “Red Ball Express” during WWII. The second brother, Berlin, served in the Navy’s 3rd Construction Battalion in the Pacific Theater and was at the Guadalcanal location when the first offensive action occurred in the Pacific during WWII. LT Bailey was the third brother born. The fourth brother, Harding, was a Navy Electrician Mate 2nd class aboard the destroyer escort, USS Mason. The USS Mason was the first ship with a predominantly African American crew during WWII. The fifth brother, Paul, was an Army Private First Class who helped Chaplains in the Western Pacific during WWII. The sixth brother, Arthur, was a Corporal and Montford Point Marine who served in the Pacific Theater spending time at Iwo Jima during WWII. The seventh brother, Carl, was a 1st LT jet Fighter Pilot in the Air Force during the Korean War. He did not fight in combat. He was the first African American jet Fighter Pilot in Florida. He died in a car accident at age 28 while on military leave.



LT Charles Bailey was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease in 1995. In 2000, he wandered from his home and was not located for several days. A search team had diligently looked for him and could not locate him. The team went out to search again, and one searcher decided to shout, “Do you know anything about the Ocala Bulls?” LT Bailey immediately replied, “Yes” and was found safe, only dehydrated, hungry and tired. It was obvious

that his military training had kept him alive and safe during the days he was missing. The Ocala Bulls was the mascot for his high school, Howard Academy in Ocala, FL.

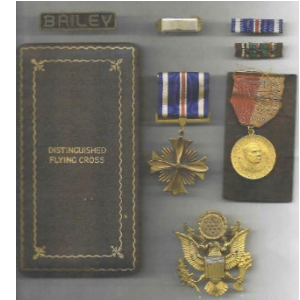
LT Bailey joined the “Lonely Eagle Chapter” on April 9, 2001 in Deland, FL at the age of 82. He was buried with full military honors that included a flyover of four F-15 jet fighters that were stationed at Patrick Air Force Base (now Patrick Space Force Base), Cape Canaveral, Florida. The Fighter Pilots flew above his gravesite in the “Missing Man Formation” signifying the loss of a fallen comrade. LT Bailey was buried at Greenwood Cemetery in Daytona Beach, Florida.



LT Bailey’s military awards, honors and lifetime recognitions include the following:

Military:

- Distinguished Flying Cross
- Air Medal with four bronze oak leaf clusters
- Presidential Unit Citation
- American Campaign Medal
- European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with one bronze oak leaf cluster
- World War II Victory Medal



Community Honors and Recognitions:

- **2000** - City of Deland, FL honored LT Bailey with a bronze plaque
- **2016** - The Bailey Terminal at Charlotte County Airport in Punta Gorda, FL was opened and officially named. This terminal was named in honor of LT Charles P. Bailey and his six brothers who served in the military.
- **Blanchard House Museum of African-American History and Culture** in Punta Gorda, FL has recognized LT Bailey with a bust statue on display to honor him.
- **African-American Museum of Arts** in Deland, FL has on display a bust statue and portrait to honor LT Bailey.
- **City of Deland, FL** placed a bronze statue of Lt. Bailey at the Deland Naval Air Station Museum to honor LT Bailey.
- **American Legion Orange Baker Post 187** in Deland, FL has honored LT Bailey with photographs on display at the Post.
- **April 2024** - Honored in FL legislation with name listed in HB-1227 - Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day. This bill designates the fourth Thursday in March as an annual state holiday to commemorate the Tuskegee Airmen.
- **May 2025** - City of Deland, FL dedicated a new roadway to LT Bailey. The road was named Charles P. Bailey Road. It is located in the city’s growing industrial business park near the Deland Municipal Airport.
- **2026** - the current National Park Service Tuskegee Airmen brochure cover features LT Bailey’s P-51 Mustang that he named “My Buddy.”

