



BIOGRAPHY

A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

Tuskegee Airmen Inc. Public Relations, P.O. Box 830060
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GEORGE W. ALLEN



Enlisted Service No.: None
Commissioned Officer Service No.: None

Charles Lindbergh's successful trans-Atlantic flight in 1927 inspired a generation of people young, old, and in-between to pursue their own dreams of flying. A young man named George W. Allen, born on August 13, 1910 in Tyrone, Pennsylvania, was especially inspired. He had retained an interest in aviation that began at the age of fifteen, when he started watching airplanes taking off and landing at his hometown's airport. The news of Lindbergh's amazing feat sparked his commitment to pursue a career in aviation that included a role in which he trained many of the men who would fly as Tuskegee Airmen in World War II.

In 1933, Allen moved to Latrobe, Pennsylvania, after learning that the city's Hill Airport had a renowned flight school, the Carroll School of Aviation, that welcomed new pilots. He impressed a respected white pilot at the school named Lloyd Santmyer who took him on as a student. Allen held a number of jobs to pay for flying lessons, including playing drums five or six days per week with dance bands. After completing his solo flight, Allen sold his car to buy a used Alexander Eaglerock that needed a lot of work to make it airworthy. He spent the ensuing winter restoring the airplane with the assistance of two mechanics, then used it to fly more than 400 hours. During that time, he earned his private license followed by a commercial license and instructor ratings.

In building flight hours, Allen flew cargo and passengers for local companies. He also worked as a flight instructor at the Carroll School of Aviation where he had first learned to fly. To support his flying activities, Allen continued his musician gigs and was a chauffeur for Pittsburgh financier James H. Rogers. His relationship with the Rogers family would extend to a famous family member detailed later in this biography.

Allen made the headlines in local newspapers for participating in an air race during the two-day Latrobe Air Derby, in which he was erroneously billed as the first black pilot allowed to compete in an air meet. Later, local media honored him for piloting flights to drop feed corn to wildlife impacted by heavy snows in western Pennsylvania during the winter of 1936. More headlines came as a result of several lengthy flights that he made to demonstrate his already extensive piloting experience and skills. In one flight he flew from Pittsburgh to Toronto, Canada, in a Piper Cub; on another occasion he flew from Pittsburgh to New York in a Brunner Winkle Bird. His flight in the Bird resulted in his admittance as charter member number three in the prestigious OX-5 Aviation Pioneers club, as this legendary engine was installed on the airplane. In 1939, he flew to Chicago for the August 25–27 air meet that was sponsored by the National Airmen's Association of America (NAAA), an organization of black pilots founded by noted aviator Willa Brown.

Also in 1939, efforts led by the NAAA resulted in the inclusion of six HBCUs in the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP), a government program developed to provide flight training to college students. One of the institutions was Tuskegee Institute, whose flight program would figure prominently in Allen's future through his

employment there in 1941 as one of three black flight instructors at the school's Kennedy Field. Allen's illustrious colleagues were Charles Alfred "Chief" Anderson, the first black pilot to hold a commercial license, and Lewis A. Jackson, a former barnstormer and graduate of Indiana Wesleyan University. When the Air Corps decided to allow blacks to fly military aircraft, Anderson left to become the chief flight instructor at Tuskegee's Moton Field, where black aviation cadets underwent the first phase of training to become military pilots. Jackson also transferred to Moton Field at the same time to become director of flight training at the facility.

After Anderson and Jackson's departures, Allen was given charge of the CPTP at Kennedy Field. Although his desire was to be an instructor of military cadets, he apparently subordinated his wish and very capably carried out his role of training Tuskegee Institute students (many of whom later became Army Air Force cadets) per CPTP requirements. Allen remained as chief pilot at Kennedy Field in 1942 when the War Training Service (WTS) succeeded the CPTP. The new name came with the different mission of performing pre-flight screening of candidates for Army Air Force aviation cadet training. Sometime afterward, Allen played a starring role in a training film called *Tuskegee Trains Airmen*. The film illustrates a flight instructor preparing a student for a successful solo flight in a Piper Cub. After the WTS was disbanded in 1944, Allen was finally assigned as a flight instructor to aviation cadets at Moton Field.



At the end of World War II, Allen returned to his pre-war employer, the Carroll School of Aeronautics, in Pennsylvania. He was the chief pilot there which required that he supervise four instructors. Among his personal students was Fred Rogers, award-winning host of the long-running children's television program, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Fred was the son of the aforementioned James H. Rogers, for whom Allen had worked as a chauffeur in the 1930s. In an interview in the early 1980s, Fred spoke warmly of Allen as being a good friend throughout his life.

In the mid-1950s, Allen moved to Toledo, Ohio, and made an abrupt career change. He went to work as a bus driver for the Community Traction Company, a privately-owned city transit provider. When it transitioned into the municipally-owned Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority (TARTA) in 1971, he transferred into an administrative role and worked as a driver training instructor before retiring in 1976.

Interestingly, he also stayed involved in aviation on a part-time basis during his time in Toledo. His plethora of ratings qualified him to be an FAA Designated Examiner. In addition, he was a freelance flight instructor at Metcalf Field, now known as Toledo Executive Airport, and at the Eugene F. Kranz Toledo Express Airport.

After a lifetime spent in the training of thousands of civilian and military aviators, George W. Allen joined the Lonely Eagles Chapter on March 5, 2003 at the age of 92.

