



BIOGRAPHY

A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

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RAYMOND CASSAGNOL



Raymond Cassagnol was born on September 20, 1920, in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, the son of Louis and Valentine (Dupont) Cassagnol. He was the seventh and last child born to his parents. There were five boys and two girls. At seventeen years old, Raymond was working with his two older brothers, learning mechanical skills. Both his brothers were employed as mechanics. In 1938, he graduated from high school in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti.

In July 1942, Raymond responded to a newspaper ad he saw in a Haitian government-sponsored newspaper. The ad stated that the Haitian government was seeking 40 airmen recruits. He was selected as an enlistee in the Haitian Army. One reason he was selected as a recruit was that he had the ability to speak four languages that included French, Creole, Spanish, and English. He was promoted to Sergeant Cassagnol and worked as a skilled aircraft mechanic in the maintenance department of the newly formed Haitian Air Force (Corps d'Aviation) at Bowen Airfield. He was known for working overtime because he felt "There was nothing else to do." His dedicated work skills lead to the Provisional Chief of Haiti's Air Squadron, Dean Eshelman, asking him if he would be interested in becoming a Pilot. In a short period, Sergeant Cassagnol found himself along with two other Haitian enlistees being selected by the U.S. Embassy to come to the U.S. for Pilot Flight Training at Tuskegee Army Air Field in Tuskegee, Alabama. Upon his arrival in Tuskegee, he was assigned to Class 43-G-SE. He became good friends with fellow classmate and roommate, Daniel "Chappie"



James, Jr. Sergeant Cassagnol successfully completed all phases of military flight training and received his Silver Pilot Wings on July 28, 1943. He was the first of five Haitian born Pilots to graduate at Tuskegee Army Air Field. Prior to his return home to Haiti, he was promoted to 2nd LT by the Haitian Air Force which was a major buzz in Haiti! LT Cassagnol's accomplishment was newsworthy on Haitian radio stations.



After returning to Haiti, LT Cassagnol served in the Haitian Air Force flying the North American AT-6 Texans (one of the aircrafts in which the Pilots trained at Tuskegee) with other Haitian airmen, patrolling the Caribbean to successfully cut off the Nazi food runs and defend against Nazi's quite frequent and at-will submarine incursions in the area. Before the patrols, Nazis in submarines made leisurely food runs on Haiti's coastal shores to gather buttermilk and baguettes. LT Cassagnol successfully logged more than 100 hours patrolling the north and south routes. After the Haitian Tuskegee Airmen took over patrolling the shoreline, the Nazis left the coastal shores this assistance in eliminating the food supply to the German enemy via the Haitian Tuskegee Airmen made their contribution to World War II and world history. LT Cassagnol also became a lead Pilot Instructor, training many Haitian Air Force cadets to fly. LT Cassagnol was honored and privileged to have earned 2-sets of Wings – Wings from Tuskegee and Wings from the Haitian Air Force. In April 1946, he resigned from the Haitian military. His resignation was denied on grounds that the Haitian community and Haiti's enemies could rumor that there was tension and conflict within the Haitian armed forces. In July 1946, LT Cassagnol submitted his resignation again and it was accepted with an effective date of August 9, 1946.



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On December 23, 1943, LT Cassagnol married his childhood sweetheart Valentine “Fifie” at “Paroisse du Sacre Coeur” - Parish of Sacred Heart in Haiti. They both were baptized at this church. They became proud parents of five children, Raymond, Jr., Mireille, Jose, Claude, and Dominique. LT Cassagnol and “Fifie” were married for 77 years and experienced over 80 years of love and devotion until her death at the age of 99 in 2021. He always said that she was the real hero.



After military service and marriage, LT Cassagnol became an entrepreneur in Haiti. He obtained a private Commercial Pilot’s license in 1947. For a period, he worked as a Pilot for the Dauphin Plantation. Beginning in the 1950’s, he owned a Sawmill and Lumber Construction company, a Bakery, and a Furniture Wood Shop to name a few businesses in which he retired.

LT Cassagnol emigrated to the USA with his wife and children when he was 42 years old, not by choice, but by necessity to live. They escaped with their five children in the middle of the night via foot and donkey to the Dominican Republic. They left all their personal possessions behind as Haiti’s President Francois “Papa Doc” Duvalier was hunting him down to kill him. LT Cassagnol was one of the Pilots that had flown a B-25 over Duvalier’s National palace dropping bombs. The Cassagnol family became political refugees, as LT Cassagnol was involved in the Haitian Revolution of which Fifie was a “silent” supporter. He fought all his life against tyranny and injustices of the Devalier regime. His dream was to see Haiti restored and her people live without fear, with freedom, justice, and peace.



Included among LT Cassagnol’s many achievements, he was a published author. He wrote a 400-page autobiography in French titled, “Memoires d’un Revolutionnaire.” The book was published in 2004. He loved God and was very strong in his Catholic faith and was part of the King of Kings Charismatic Prayer Group for many years and enjoyed singing and praising the Lord. He loved Haiti. He loved the USA. He was a courageous and dedicated man with integrity and resilience.

In November 2000, LT Cassagnol returned to Tuskegee, AL to visit Moton Field. He stated that "revisiting Tuskegee was a dream come true." He only wanted to visit Tuskegee when it was the right moment.



Haitian-Tuskegee Airman Receives Medal - April 6, 2010

In April 2010, LT Cassagnol received a replica of the Congressional Gold Medal that was presented by Florida U.S. Representative Suzanne Kosmas at a special ceremony in his honor. He had missed the 2007 Tuskegee Airmen Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony in Washington, D.C. On October 27, 2020, the Seminole County, FL Board of Commissioners in Florida honored him with a proclamation for his service during World War II. On May 20, 2021, the New York General Assembly honored the contribution of LT Cassagnol and other Haitians for New York’s Haitian Unity Day, in conjunction with observance of Haitian Heritage Month. In April 2024, LT Cassagnol was honored in FL legislation with his name listed in Florida HB-1227 - Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day. This bill designates the fourth Thursday in March as an annual State Holiday to commemorate the Tuskegee Airmen.



LT Cassagnol joined the “Lonely Eagle Chapter” when he passed away peacefully in his Florida home on June 24, 2023, at the age of 102. He was surrounded by his loving family. Of the five Haitian born Tuskegee Airmen trained Pilots, LT Cassagnol was the last surviving one. He is buried at Chapel Hill Cemetery in Orlando, FL.

