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Tuskegee Weathermen Integral to Success

The new airmen's dormitory on Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, was memorialized recently in honor of the Tuskegee Airmen. Most of us are aware of these intrepid aviators; however, we have little knowledge of the accomplishments of the African-American weathermen who supported the Tuskegee flight program as well as other segregated units.

So far as can be determined, there were no African-Americans in the U.S. Weather Bureau at the outset of World War II. At least none were commissioned or enlisted into the Army Air Forces weather service from the Weather Bureau.

The training of African-Americans to fill enlisted observer and forecaster positions began at Chanute Field, Illinois, in March 1941. More than 40 enlisted weathermen eventually served at the Tuskegee weather detachment during World War II.

Fifteen African-Americans were commissioned as Army Air Forces weather officers during World War II. These men received their commissions primarily from the

meteorological aviation cadet program, although several did complete Officer Candidate School having served first as enlisted weathermen.

The Tuskegee weather detachment was activated on March 21, 1942. Two white officers from Maxwell Field, Alabama, were initially detailed to the unit. The detachment received technical supervision initially from the 4th Weather Region, and, upon its activation in April 1943, from the Weather Wing at Asheville, North Carolina.



Base weather station (left) at Tuskegee Field, Alabama, circa 1944.

Wallace P. Reed entered the second meteorological aviation cadet class at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in July 1941. He graduated in February 1942, and following a three-week orientation at Mitchel Field, New York, 2Lt Reed was assigned as Tuskegee station weather officer on March 25, 1942.

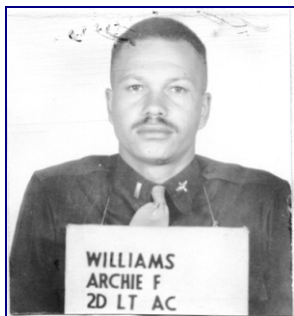
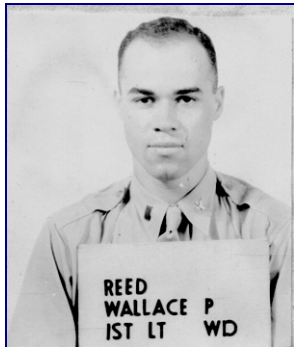
Following their training other African-American weather officers were assigned to flying squadrons. Four eventually deployed to the Mediterranean combat theater with their squadrons.

African-American weather officers also served with segregated units during the war at Selfridge and Oscoda Fields, Michigan; at Walterboro, South Carolina; at Freeman Field, Indiana; and at Godman Field, Kentucky.

2Lt Archie F. Williams returned to Tuskegee in September 1943. Better known as a gold medal winner at the 1936 Olympics, Williams had been a civilian flight instructor at Tuskegee, but was not at that time eligible for military flight training. He did earn his military wings prior to the end of World War II and served in Air Weather Service the rest of his career, retiring as a command pilot in 1964.

The record is incomplete, but it is clear that the Tuskegee weathermen were integral to the success of the Tuskegee Airmen. ☆

Images of the Tuskegee Weather Detachment



Personnel of the Tuskegee weather detachment, circa 1944. (front row, left to right) Lt Grant Franklin, Lt Archie Williams, Capt Wallace Reed, Lt John Branche, Lt Paul Wise, and Lt Robert Preer.

USAFE OWS Continues AFW's Sembach Heritage



Construction of Sembach Air Base, Germany, 1953.



This unofficial 31st Weather Squadron emblem was in use in 1953.

The official lineage of the U.S. Air Forces in Europe Operational Weather Squadron began on December 1, 1997, when the USAFE Theater Weather Support Squadron was activated at Sembach Air Base, Germany. The squadron was redesignated the USAFE Operational Weather Squadron on February 17, 1999, as part of the Air Force Weather reengineering effort to serve as Air Force Weather's European "hub."

However, the origins of Air Force Weather presence at Sembach Air Base began soon after the initial base construction was complete. On September 1, 1951, U.S. authorities

officially took over the construction site from the French engineers who had begun construction earlier in 1951. In the spring of 1953, the base's administrative area was completed and the 7355th Air Base Squadron was assigned as the base operating unit.



The Air Force approved the USAFE Operational Weather Squadron emblem in August 1998.

On July 6, 1953, Detachment 20 of Air Weather Service's 31st Weather Squadron was organized at Sembach. Capt John W. Collens III assumed command of Detachment 20 in November 1954. Brigadier General Collens commanded Air Weather Service, 1974-1975.

Except for a short period in 1974-1975 when the Sembach weather station was organized as Operating Location A of the 2d Weather Wing, the 31st Weather Squadron's Detachment 20 remained at Sembach until the divestiture of Air Weather Service in 1991. At that time the resources and mission were assigned to USAFE. ☆

AFW's Roots Planted by the Army Medical Corps

In the last issue, we noted that Air Force Weather traces its heritage to the U.S. Army Signal Corps—directly to the Meteorology Section established in 1917, but more generally to 1870 and the organization of the first national weather service under Chief Signal Officer Brig Gen Albert J. Myer.

General Myer was an Army surgeon serving at a frontier post in Texas until his childhood fascination with the telegraph combined with his personal study of American Indian signaling garnered his appointment as the Army's Chief Signal Officer in 1860. Myer never lost sight of his training as an Army physician and, as such, his

daily observing and recording of the weather.

The association between the Army Medical Corps and meteorology began in 1814 when the Surgeon General of the Army, Dr. James Tilton, instructed all post surgeons to begin recording weather observations.

The voluminous publications of the Medical Corps on the climatology of the areas surrounding Army forts were among the first such American studies and gave great impetus to the advancement of meteorology in the U.S.

Even before Congress chartered the Signal Corps to organize a weather service, Myer had begun

outlining a process whereby the Signal Corps incorporated the daily observations of the Medical Corps into Army signaling.

The Signal Corps assumed responsibility for collating the Medical Corps observations in 1870, but Army surgeons continued their daily regime of weather observations through the 19th century. Most post surgeons had ended the practice of recording daily weather observations by the end of the Spanish-American War. The U.S. Military Academy surgeon was probably the last to continue recording observations, doing so until 1927. ☆



Army surgeon Albert J. Myer, posed for this photo enroute to Fort Duncan, Texas, October 1854.

Members of AFW among the AF's 12 Outstanding

At the recent Air Force Association convention, SSgt Terri D. Palmer, a weather operations journeyman assigned to the 15th Air Support Operations Squadron at Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia, was recognized as one of the Twelve Outstanding Airmen of the Year for 2004.

Among SSgt Palmer's many accomplishments was her work imbedded with the 3d Infantry Division during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

The Air Force Association began the award program in 1956, recognizing 19

airmen. By 1969 the number of airmen recognized annually had grown to 24. The current program of recognizing only 12 airmen a year began the following year, in 1970.

Available records show four other members of Air Force Weather have been recognized during the annual program.

TSgt Richard E. Williamson, a forecaster at Detachment 14, 7th Weather Squadron, Heidelberg, Germany, was among the recipients in 1969.

TSgt Cynthia G. Medonca, a forecaster at the Air Force Global Weather Central, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, was one of the 1982 Twelve Outstanding Airmen.

TSgt Frank J. Hall III, noncommissioned officer in charge, Detachment 25, 5th Weather Wing, Howard Air Force Base, Panama, was honored in 1987.

TSgt Ronald A. LaRosa, comptroller for the 4th Weather Wing, Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado, was one of the Twelve Outstanding Airmen of the Year for 1989. ☆



SSgt Terri D. Palmer, a weather operations journeyman, is one of the 2004 Twelve Outstanding Airmen of the Year.

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"Provide the historical perspective for Air Force Weather to know its past, understand its present, and anticipate its future."

Looking Back at Air Force Weather

October 7, 1946, An Air Weather Service WB-29 made the first flight over the top of a hurricane.

October 12, 1945, As directed by the War Department, the last Army Air Forces weather units outside the continental United States were assigned to the Army Air Forces Weather Service.

October 24, 1960, Air Weather Service declared the newly installed IBM 7090 operational at the Global Weather Central, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska.

October 31, 1898, Randolph P. Williams, the "Father of Air Force Weather," was born in Baltimore, Maryland.

November 4, 1964, The first AN/FPS-77 weather radar was delivered to Griffiss Air Force Base, New York.

November 11, 1974, Air Weather Service accepted the first AN/TMQ-22 tactical meteorological measuring sets from the contractor.

November 26, 1980, Air Weather Service was assigned responsibility for weather support of the U.S. Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, which was activated March 1, 1980.

December 7, 1973, Air Force directed Air Weather Service's WB-57F high-altitude aerial sampling mission transferred to Strategic Air Command.

December 14, 1959, Air Weather Service was directed to establish an operational numerical flight plan system.

December 23, 1970, Air Weather Service completed testing of the AN/TMQ-25 tactical ceilometer and declared it "suitable" for use in Vietnam.



An AN/FPS-77 weather radar console.



An AWS WB-57F.

"Whenever the weather licks the pilot instead of him lickin' the weather, he's finished."

Frank Wead
Ceiling Zero, 1935

RDJTF Development Led to CENTCOM Activation

Events of the late 1970s, such as the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, were perceived to threatened stability in the "Middle East," where the U.S. then had virtually no military presence.

In response, the Department of Defense activated the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, on March 1, 1980, to provide a global response force.

Members of the 1st

Weather Squadron, then at MacDill, drafted a weather support requirements letter that the RDJTF leadership sent forward to Military Airlift Command in July 1980. MAC leadership supported the proposal, but asked for formal documentation.

On October 29, 1980, the Joint Chiefs of Staff designated the Air Force responsible for providing weather support to the RDJTF. In turn, on November 26, 1980, the Air Staff assigned the

mission to Air Weather Service.

The RDJTF was soon developed into a de facto regional command targeted at Southwest Asia. On December 31, 1982, the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force was inactivated.

In its place, U.S. Central Command was activated on January 1, 1983, to serve as the regional command, becoming arguably the most engaged of the unified commands. ☆