



Lt Col (Ret) *Alexander Jefferson*



Alexander Jefferson was born on 15 November 1921 in Detroit, Michigan. He graduated from Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia in June 1942 with a bachelor's degree in chemistry and biology. While working toward a master's degree in chemistry from Howard University in Washington, D.C., Alexander applied for and was accepted by the Aviation Cadet Program of the Army Air Corps at Tuskegee Army Airfield in Tuskegee, Alabama in April 1943. He earned his wings in January 1944 and was commissioned as a second lieutenant.

Soon after, Jefferson began flying P-51 Mustang missions in the famous Tuskegee Airmen as part of 332nd Fighter Group, the "Red Tails", in Ramitelli Air Base, Italy under Colonel Benjamin O. Davis. The Tuskegee Airmen were the first American all-black military pilots and crewmen.

They served during World War II fighting enemies overseas and discrimination at home. After having previously flown only P-39s and P-47s, Jefferson flew his first combat mission in the P-51 after just three hours of transition training. He flew 18 long range escort missions for B-17s and B-24s. On his 18th mission, three days before the invasion of Southern France, he was shot down by anti-aircraft artillery while flying a low-level strafing mission against a radar station over Toulon, France on 12 August 1944.



After bailing out, he was immediately captured by the same German anti-aircraft artillery crew that shot him down. Having not seen him bail out, his wingmen assumed he died. His parents received a letter informing them that their son had been killed in action. It was not until a month later when they received a letter from the Red Cross listing him as a prisoner of war (POW) that they learned he was still alive.



For the next nine months, Lieutenant Jefferson was held as a POW in Germany. He was first a prisoner in Stalag Luft III in Sagan, Germany—the same camp made famous in the movie "The Great Escape." Due to the Allies' rapid approach, Jefferson and the other prisoners were forced to march fifty miles in sub-zero temperatures and pressed into a railcar, taking them to Stalag VIIA near Mooseburg, Germany.

On 29 April 1945, Patton's Third Army liberated Stalag VIIA. Jefferson is one of only 32 Tuskegee Airman to be held as a POW during WWII. Of his captivity he says, "I was treated as an officer and a gentleman. I didn't have any interaction with the Germans because that was the role of the highest ranking POW in the camp." He and the rest of the prisoners kept up with the war's progress by listening to the BBC on a small contraband radio. One of his most vivid memories as a POW was made when a B-17 crew came into the camp. Upon hearing that Jefferson was a Tuskegee Airman, one of the crew told him, "Had you Red Tails been with us, we wouldn't have been shot down."



Jefferson in a recorded interview inside a German POW camp during World War II.

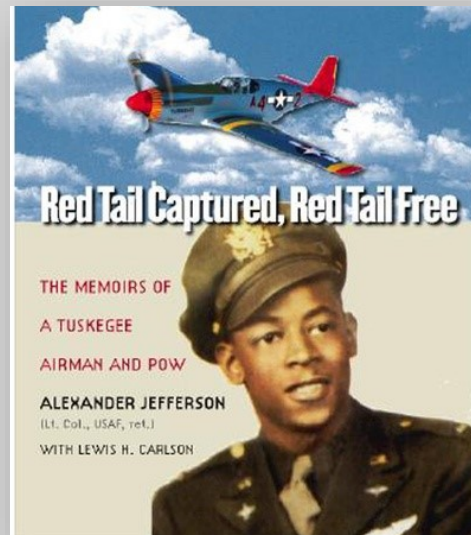
Following the war, Jefferson served as an instrument instructor in advanced flight training at Tuskegee Army Air Field and as a Staff Operations and Training Officer in the 9504th Air Recovery Squadron. He was discharged from active duty in 1947 and retired from the reserves in 1969 as a Lieutenant Colonel. He was awarded the **Purple Heart** in 2004 for his efforts during WWII.

Jefferson returned to civilian life in 1947, received his teaching certificate from Wayne State University, and began teaching elementary school science for the Detroit Public School System. Jefferson received his M.A. degree in education in 1954. He was appointed assistant principal in 1969 and served the Michigan School System for over 30 years. In 1995, Jefferson was enshrined in the Michigan Aviation Hall of Fame. In 2001, he was awarded the Purple Heart, and in 2007, he received the Congressional Gold Medal. **Jefferson is one of the founders of the Detroit and National chapters of the Tuskegee Airmen.**

<http://goefoundation.org/eagles/biographies/j/355/Jefferson-Alexander>

Awards

In **1995**, Jefferson was enshrined in the **Michigan Aviation Hall of Fame**. In **2004**, President George W. Bush awarded Jefferson with a **Purple Heart** for being wounded while being shot down over German occupied France. On March 29, **2007**, Jefferson attended a ceremony in the U.S. Capitol rotunda, where he and the other veterans of the Tuskegee Airmen (and their widows) were awarded the **Congressional Gold Medal** in recognition of their service. In **2010**, Jefferson was honored as an Eagle in the Gathering of the Eagles foundation.



Book

Red Tail Captured, Red Tail Free: Memoirs of a Tuskegee Airman and POW, is a personal memoir of those who served America in World War II and after.

Documentary

A film about Lt. Col. Alexander Jefferson was made in 2016 called, **The Luft Gangster: Memoirs of A Second Class Hero**. It is an award-winning documentary about the life and legacy of Alexander Jefferson.

www.LuftGangsterMovie.com



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