



BACKGROUND TO *RED TAILS*

THE INSPIRATION AND HISTORY

The history of the Tuskegee Airmen began when the Civil Aeronautics Authority selected 13 cadets to participate in an experiment at the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama aimed at training “coloured personnel” to become combat pilots for service in the Army Air Corps. However, fierce discrimination, lack of institutional support and the belief that these men lacked the intelligence and aptitude to be pilots or maintain military aircraft dogged their every step.

When they were finally awarded the opportunity to fight for the Allied forces during World War II, these men flew thousands of missions, and in a two-year period between 1943 and 1945, the Tuskegee Airmen shot down more than a hundred German aircraft, including three of the first German jets ever used in combat. Their planes, P-51 Mustangs painted with distinct red tails, came to be feared by the enemies and respected by allies.

By the end of the war, the Tuskegee Airmen had earned 96 Distinguished Unit Citations and as individual pilots earned several Silver Stars, Purple Hearts and hundreds of other awards and medals.

“I thought their story would make a great film,” says Red Tails producer George Lucas, “An inspirational one that shows the incredible things these men went through to patriotically serve with valour and help the world battle back the evils of fascism. It is an amazing story, and I wanted to memorialise it.”

To be as true as possible to the spirit of the Tuskegee Experience would require direct input from the original Airmen themselves. Lucas and producers Rick McCallum and Charles Floyd Johnson spent hundreds of hours with the surviving Tuskegee Airmen, visiting them in their homes, attending the annual Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. National Convention and hosting many of them at Skywalker Ranch, George Lucas’s production offices in Northern California.



“When I first met many of the Tuskegee Airmen, they were in their 50s and they were captains of industry, educators, entrepreneurs and community activists,” recounts Johnson. “They all had a real interest in making sure people knew about their legacy.”

Though rooted in history, the story Lucas wanted to tell was not one found in thick, dusty tomes that line a study hall. Lucas envisioned an action-packed inspirational picture about phenomenally skilled and brave young men who fly amazing machines in very dangerous situations.

“This is an adventure movie and not a civil rights movie,” says Dr. Roscoe Brown, one of the original Tuskegee Airmen who consulted on the film. “It is about us overcoming the obstacle of racism with excellence and friendship, camaraderie and discipline. Those are the eternal lessons that affect anybody.”



MEETING THE REAL AIRMEN

The characters of *Red Tails* are fictitious, but their story is not. The pilots seen in the movie are composites of real life heroes. *"This is a true story,"* says screenwriter John Ridley, *"but unfortunately, we could not tell everyone's story. What we hoped to do is honour everyone's story, black and white, who worked together to make this moment happen."*

To that end, several original Tuskegee Airmen met with the actors, including making the trip to Prague, where the film was in production, to witness and advise as cameras rolled.

"We met Dr. Roscoe Brown, Lee Archer and Bill Holloman before we started shooting," recalls Michael B. Jordan. *"They gave us all the facts we needed to know and that gave us the layers we needed to play these men."*

"I was on the set in my uniform and I would walk up to one of them and ask if I was wearing it right," says Oyelowo who plays Joe 'Lightening' Little. *"Having them there was a constant reminder of the fact that this wasn't just any old acting gig."*

"I felt so small at times with them," says Royo (who plays Coffee, the squadron's crew chief). *"I'm an actor. I want to make movies. It's a hard job sometimes, but I play pretend. When I got around the Tuskegee Airmen, they had so much energy and spoke so eloquently, that I just wanted to suck as much of that in as possible. I wanted to get them, so that when Anthony said 'action' I could resonate what they were resonating as best I could. As an actor you just don't come across living breathing history very often. For me, meeting those men was probably one of the best feelings I've ever had."*

"This is an awesome responsibility," says Ne-Yo (who plays Andrew 'Smokey' Salem). *"It definitely makes me want to step up my game. I feel more than privileged to be a part of this. There are almost no words to describe the magnitude of this project. We're going to do the best to make the Tuskegee Airmen proud. I want them to see this movie and say, 'They hit the nail right on the head.'"*