

Retired Colonel Harold Brown 93 years old, Tuskegee Airman

By Marsha Bordner



Meet Colonel Harold Brown, a resident of Port Clinton, Ohio—a man who knew in the 6th grade that he would be a pilot. He is an accomplished man who grew up in an era when African Americans were severely marginalized. Despite this fact, he said: “I was certain that all of the obstacles would be resolved by the time I finished high school and I would be selected for flight training.”

After graduating from high school, he applied for military flight training and he reported to Tuskegee Institute for flight training.

Brown successfully completed his training and graduated on May 23, 1944, receiving his wings and commission as a 2nd Lieutenant, at 19 years of age. After graduation, Brown was off to fighter training for about 90 days, then overseas to join the 332nd Fighter Group stationed in Ramitelli, Italy. Their job was to protect bombers on their missions. The Tuskegee Airmen were extremely successful. “Initially the bombers didn’t know who was flying **The Red Tails**” (a nickname for the planes flown by the Tuskegee Airmen). In time, the bomber pilots were saying things like: “Man, these guys stick with us, they don’t leave us, they pick up stragglers, find them, and bring them home.” When they learned who we were, most of the bombers pilots were happy, but there were a few who would still rather take their chances than have us. But it was overwhelmingly the other way. They started calling us the **Red Tailed Angels**, because we lost so few bombers.”

On his 12th mission, December 9, 1944, Lt. Brown’s plane was hit by enemy ground fire; however, he made it into friendly territory. He blames this on the “exuberance of youth.” He and his wingman chased a German ME 262

twin-engine jet. "We should have broken it off and we didn't. So the enemy led us over enemy positions and we got caught in heavy ground fire." After reaching friendly territory, Brown experienced fuel exhaustion. "I began looking for a place to crash land when I spotted an abandoned air strip." The plane was heavily damaged, but he walked away from it. Brown said, "There is an old saying, 'Any landing you can walk away from is a good landing.'" Six days later he made it back to base.

On his 30th mission—a strafing mission—he was shot down and captured. At age 20 he was a prisoner of war and held at a POW camp south of Nuremberg. It was here that he saw a fellow airman, Lincoln Hudson, who had been beaten almost beyond recognition. During his two months of imprisonment, Brown, himself, was not tortured or beaten.

The Americans were advancing and the Germans decided to evacuate the 10,000 prisoners to Stalag Luft VII-A at Moosburg (about 30 kilometers north of Munich, Germany.) The trip would take about 10-12 days and they were bunched into groups of 200. The prisoners arrived in Moosburg. In the distance Brown and the others could hear General George Patton and his tanks advancing. On April 29, 1945, Patton arrived at the prison camp. The Germans had pulled out a couple of hours earlier. Brown said, "There was much hollering and screaming by the 25,000 prisoners who knew the war was over for us and we would soon be on our way home!"

After his flying days and a 23-year stint in the U.S. Air Force concluded in 1965, Brown entered the educational field, serving as instructor and chairman of the electronics department for Columbus Area Technician School (CATS), which had about 150 students at the time, and had been founded only two years earlier. The tiny technical school became Columbus Technical Institute (CTI) the next year, and was rechartered to Columbus State Community College nearly 20 years later.

During commencement in 2013, Heidelberg University presented Colonel Brown with an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree

Following his retirement, Brown founded Brown & Associates, an educational consulting firm that he ran for 26 years until retiring at age 88. Currently Col. Brown is a supporter of the new Liberty Aviation Museum in Port Clinton and regularly holds classes for visiting students there.