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.

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.
Construction of Sembach Air Base, Germany, 1953.

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

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.

USAFO OWS Continues AFW's Sembach Heritage

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.


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.