Tuskegee airmen
from The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide

Name given to the young black US pilots who received flight training at Tuskegee Army Air Field in Alabama during and shortly after World War II, and served on bombing missions in North Africa and Europe. The Tuskegee Army Air Field was the only flight training facility for black pilots of the US Army Air Force 1941–46. The first classes of Tuskegee airmen were trained to be fighter pilots for the 99th Fighter Squadron, intended for combat duty in North Africa. Additional pilots were assigned to the 322nd Fighter Group, which engaged in combat along with the 99th Squadron from bases in Italy. During the war, the Tuskegee airmen faced the contradiction between fighting for democracy overseas and being denied civil rights at home.

Between March 1942 and June 1946, 992 men graduated from pilot training at Tuskegee, and approximately 450 of them were sent overseas to fly P-39, P-40, P-47, and P-51 fighter aircraft in combat. During the same period, approximately 150 lost their lives while in training or on combat flights, and another 32 became prisoners of war. There are Tuskegee Airmen Chapters across the USA.

They were called the Schwartze Vogelmenshen 'black birdmen' by the Germans, while white US bomber crews reverently referred to them as the 'Black Redtail Angels' because of the identifying red paint on the aircraft tail assemblies and because of their reputation for not losing bombers to enemy fighters as they provided fighter escort on bombing missions over targets in Europe.