



# THE AMERICAN LEGION

*"The Friendly Word" from "The Friendly Post"*

1655 Simms Street

Post 178

Lakewood, CO



## **Lt. Col. (ret.) James H. Harvey III** **Tuskegee Airman / America's First "Top Gun"**

*By Dave Dupree*

*Wherever excellence is appreciated and valued, the dedication, vision, and valor of the Tuskegee Airmen are a mile post of USA history and of human achievement.*

*This is the story of one of them. A gentleman whose perspective of life, values, goals set, and goals achieved encourage us to become our highest selves, and with others share the joy of adding to the human potential.*

*The Tuskegee Airmen built trust for hopeful futures for all of us. Col. James Harvey enriches everyone that meets him by his constant spirit of joy, iron-willed focus, and self-discipline. His life story reveals a continual choice to be the best humanity has to offer. He is truly an American treasure.*

**—Allan Lockheed Jr.**

"Send us your best pilots," read the January, 1949 directive from Air Force Chief of Staff, Gen. Carl A. Spaatz. The official order requested every Air Force Fighter Group across the country to the inaugural "United States Continental Gunnery Meet" to take place in May, 1949 at Las Vegas Air Force Base, now Nellis AFB.

The fascinating story of how a 24-year-old African-American was selected to be one of the three primary pilots of the 332nd Fighter Group Weapons Team representing the Tuskegee Airmen begins years earlier. It's a tale as old as flight itself, repeated innumerable times by countless impressionable youths. In Harvey's case, his curiosity was captured one day by the sound of four P-40s moving



*Lt. Col James H. Harvey III.  
Photo credit, Deborah Grigsby.*

in formation across a blue sky directly above his yard in the peaceful mountain town of Nuangola Station, Pennsylvania where he grew up. "I want to do that," he vowed. In that instant, a destiny took flight that would propel him from initial inspiration all the way to becoming America's first "Top Gun."

"Harvey," as he likes to be called, was born July 13, 1923 in the industrial northeast town of Montclair, New Jersey, the first of four children born to James and Cornelia Harvey. His brother Charles arrived nine years later. Sisters Dorothy and Cornelia followed three years apart.

Harvey's father worked for American Chain and Cable Company operating machinery that wove strands of steel into the cable used to suspend

**LEGION CHAPLAIN**  
*Russ Scott*

*Lord, please grant us your grace and peace in these troubled times. Give our leaders the wisdom and fortitude to protect this great country. Be with those in uniform and grant them your mercy and protection from harm. Bless the people of Ukraine and give them victory in their fight for freedom. Be with each of us as we travel through this world and grant us your love when dealing with each other. Amen.*

*Harvey continued on page 4.*

**COMMANDER'S REPORT**  
*Wes Vanderpool*

Your 2023 membership cards are being processed. I've received several inquiries about checks not being cashed yet. The delay is due to a new processes put out by National. Cashing the checks prior to submitting the renewals didn't make sense with the new steps. Thank you for your patience while the Adjutant and I work through these new procedures.

The SOB was a great success! A big thank you to **Bob Black, Randy Baria, Shawn Bloomer**, and everyone else who helped make this a great event!

As changes continue to happen, please keep in mind that the officers and I are working to make the post a place where everyone feels at home. If there is anything you'd like change or implement, reach out to me and bring your ideas on how to make it happen!



*Our multi-talented Commander, Wes Vanderpool, was seen jamming with the David Davis Band Warrior River Boys at the SOB Dinner.*

**See pictures of the event on Post 178's facebook page.**

**SAL REPORT**  
*Brad Hall*

We have finally received our membership cards for 2023. You can pay your dues at any time now.

By now the Horseshoe tourney will have come and gone. Results will be in next months letter. September 17th is the Car Show and the SAL will be selling Pork Spare ribs from about 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. We will set up in the back yard (in the shade) at the BBQ grill.

**Dave McBrien** can still use help in the kitchen for Friday dinners and Sunday breakfasts. He has an excellent group of volunteers now, but they can use a break now and again. See me or Dave if you would like to help out. It is always appreciated! Thank a Veteran when you see one.

**RIDERS REPORT**  
*Rodney Jones*

Welcome to September. This month we begin our 1st Friday Dinner with steak, salmon, and shrimp. Don't forget to join us from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. It's our pleasure to serve you.

We will hold our regularly scheduled meeting on Saturday, September 3rd at 10:00 a.m. and will be throwing horseshoes in support of the SAL Tournament that afternoon. Everyone is welcome.

We are scheduled to go to the **ROMP** from September 9th through the 11th. This is an annual event mapped out by our own **Joe Calabro**, where we travel through mountain passes and valleys. It's a fun ride through the beautiful views. When we return we will be delighted to serve our taco and burritos, buffet style, on the 16th. Thank you everyone, for your support. Be safe and enjoy the rest of the summer.



**Just Like Dad's Beef Jerky Project**

*Thanks to generous donations from the Legion and SAL in August we were able to restock our London Broil supply plus all the spices.*

*We sent beef jerky to the 1st. Battalion, 503rd Airborne Infantry Regiment and received a thank you note from the commander expressing that the jerky was AWESOME!*

*We completed shipments to the Army's Delta Force, the 140th Security Group of the Air National Guard, and to our bartender, Chrissie Garritano's son, who is deployed with the Air Force.*

*We also added two volunteers, Donna and Denny Bendt.*

*Pictured: Randy Kipp (l.), Lori Kipp, Denny Bendt, Donna Bendt (r.).*



## BUSINESS REPORT

*Bob Heen*

**Bill Beard** and **Doug Schwab** completed their remodel of the men's bathroom. As reported last month the project required replacing the flooring, walls, toilet, and sink as well as a repaint. Can't thank Bill and Doug enough for the many hours they put in getting the job accomplished.

Our **11th Annual Car Show** organized by **Dave Dupree** is Saturday, September 17. In conjunction with this event, we have ordered a limited number of t-shirts which we will be selling for \$25. If you are interested in a shirt, Bob will accept pre-orders to reserve yours.



A limited number of Car Show t-shirts are available in size large, x-large, and xx-large. The cost is \$25 each. See Bob. a.m. with BBQ ribs for sale from 11:00 a.m. to noon. We will not have bar bingo on that date.

We will also be selling raffle tickets for a garage art curtain for a \$1 each or 6 for \$5. The curtain is currently on display in the game room and the winner will be drawn at the Car Show Awards Presentation at 1:00 p.m. on the 17th.



Breakfast on the 17th will be from 8:00 to 10:00

## AUXILIARY REPORT

*Kay Scott*

**ATTENTION** all Auxiliary Members! Time change for our monthly meetings. We continue to meet the first Tuesday of each month, but now starting at 1800 hrs. (6:00 p.m.) We have lots to discuss at our next meeting on September 6th, projects to plan, and opportunities to help make a difference to Veterans, active-duty Military, and their families.

A HUGE thank you to all helping to make the Auxiliary Silent Auction at the August 20th **Commander's SOB Pig Roast** a success! I'm going to try to personally thank those helping and donating, but if I forgot someone please know you are most appreciated: **Mary Lisco, Randy Baria, Mitch and Leslie Moore, Sher-ee Metcalf, Sharen Mitchell, Rose Roberts, Judy Myers, Rita Swanson, Kim Gebinine, Judy Eberley, Donna McKelvy, Carol and Brian Conway, Sue Vacilek, Dee Yurko, Chuck Elsen, Russ Scott, Noni Parr, Carol Doehler, and Lloyd Newland.** Thanks to everyone bidding on and purchasing items. \$1,500 was raised!

Wednesday Dinner Night Menus for September:

September 7th, Meatloaf, Twice-Baked Potatoes, Green Beans

September 14th, Hamburgers, Cheeseburgers, Fish, Shrimp, French Fries, Onion Rings

September 21st, Grilled Ham and Cheese Sandwich with Potato Salad

September 28th, Chicken Wings, Macaroni & Cheese

Our next project will be the **Car Show and Bake Sale** Saturday, September 17th. We are looking for pies, cakes, breads, cookies, blondies, brownies, caramel corn, krack korn; the list is likely endless! We need snackin' items for folks at the show, and items for folks to take home to enjoy. You could make two loaves of banana bread, slice one loaf and put individual slices in zip sandwich bags, and put the other loaf in a large zip bag. Some baked goods can be put in the freezer now/soon, and others such as caramel corn will need to be made shortly before the Show.

Garage art will be raffled with the winner drawn at the Car Show on Saturday, September 17th. The artwork by **Jerry Potts of Steele Tattoos** features a P-47 warbird as flown by the show's Special Honoree, Tuskegee Airman James H. Harvey III.



the San Francisco Bay Bridge, among other projects.

The family moved to Pennsylvania in 1934, first to Wilkes-Barre then Nuangola Station in 1937 where they were the only African-American family. Harvey recalls their home having electricity, but no indoor plumbing.

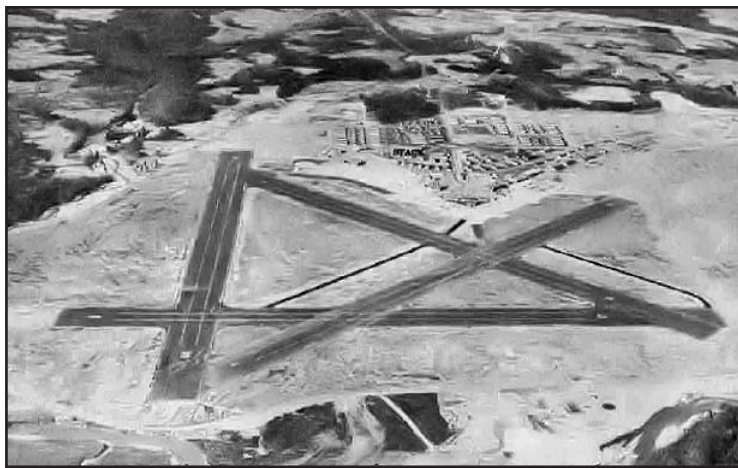
Harvey's first six years of school were divided between Silver Lake and Montclair, New Jersey. He attended a two-room school in Nuangola Station in seventh and eighth grades, then advanced to Fairview High School in Mountain Top, Pennsylvania, which required daily rides on the school bus.

He reports having experienced no prejudice whatsoever in high school or in the community where his family lived. He was treated like everyone else, even though he was the only African-American in high school until twelfth grade, when a black girl enrolled.

Wrapped in the freedom of that color blind environment he excelled, becoming the anchor man on the gymnastics team ("because I got to hold all the pretty girls") and captain of the basketball team. He was elected senior class president and graduated Valedictorian.

His dream of flying still very much alive, he then applied for cadet training in the Army Air Corps but was told they weren't accepting enlistments. In truth, the Army was in desperate need of pilots, but only if they were white.

Instead, he was drafted. Leaving his idyllic childhood behind, Harvey boarded a train on March 3, 1943 bound for Ft. Meade, Maryland with a stop the next morning in Washington, D.C. for breakfast. When it was time to re-board, he was ushered onto a separate car at the rear of the train. The incident served as Harvey's initiation to the harsh reality of racial discrimination. It seemed incomprehensible to him. He confides that not a day has



*Tuskegee Army Air Field, February 11, 1943*

passed in the nearly 80 years since that fateful train ride in which he has not felt the relentless din of racism.

After a physical and completing a battery of written aptitude tests, he was assigned to the Army Air Corps Engineers as a bulldozer operator. Frustrated with the duty, he was allowed to apply for flight training. Ten hope-

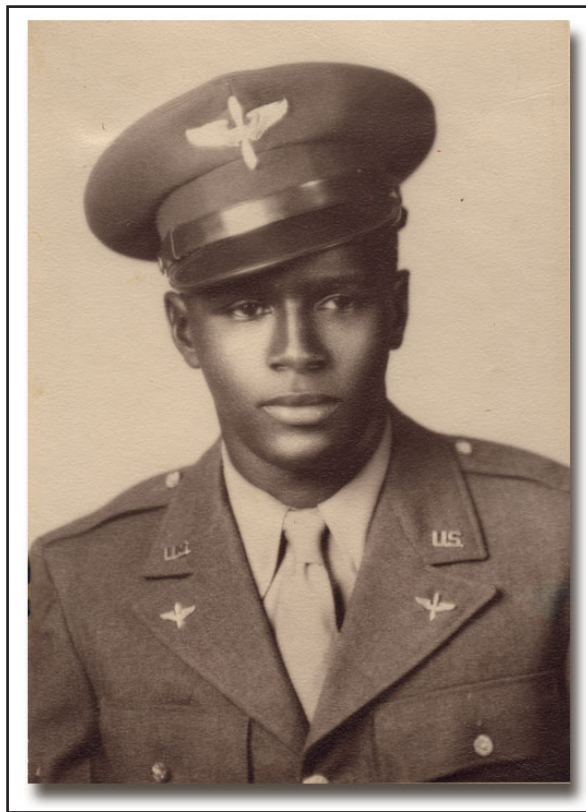
fuls took physicals and written exams at Bolling Field outside of Washington, D.C.; Harvey and nine whites. The two with the highest scores, Harvey and one other, were selected for flight school.

He was off to Keesler Field in Biloxi, Mississippi for 30 days of basic training, then to Moton Field in Tuskegee, Alabama, part of the Tuskegee Institute, for primary training in a Fairchild PT-19 and classroom instruction in English, mathematics, Morse Code, navigation, aircraft, ship, and submarine identification, and hands-on detection of lethal gasses used in WWI. He then went to nearby Tuskegee Army Air Field for basic training in a Vultee BT-13 "Vibrator" and advanced training including instrument, weather, and night flying in a North American AT-6. Upon graduation he was commissioned a

second lieutenant and received his wings on October 16, 1944.

At the time, the "wash out rate" for white aviation cadets was 63%. It was only 40% for cadets at Tuskegee. That was not acceptable to top brass, so they established a mandatory 73% or higher wash out rate for Tuskegee cadets, 10% higher than for whites. Students were failed for anything, often having nothing to do with actual flying. Harvey recalls one cadet being washed out for having a spot on his trousers. Tuskegee students had to be perfect in every aspect of training.

As a result, many excellent black cadets did not become aviators. "I was a perfectionist," says Harvey. "I wasn't going to get washed out. It never



*1st. Lieutenant with wings, October 16, 1944.*



crossed my mind. When we graduated we were better pilots than our instructors.”

The Tuskegee Institute was founded by Booker T. Washington in 1881. The Civil Aeronautics Administration established a civilian pilot training program at Moton Field in 1939. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt helped the Institute secure a loan from the Rosenwald Fund to build an airfield where they could get basic and advanced training. Some became white instructors to black cadets.

Mrs. Roosevelt was very interested in the aeronautical school. During a highly publicized 1941 visit to Tuskegee she took a flight with Charles Anderson, the Institute’s Chief Flight Instructor. While an anxious Secret Service vexed on the ground, Anderson piloted Mrs. Roosevelt over the Alabama countryside for more than an hour. Press coverage of her visit gave positive exposure for the Institute and was a testament to the competency of its student pilots. She wrote about her experience in her weekly newspaper column, “My Day.” She was so impressed that she maintained correspondence with some of the airmen.

However, in the minds of Army brass the “Tuskegee Experiment,” as it was pejoratively called, was designed to fail. The justification was rooted by misleading and dishonest stereotypes contained in the Army War College report of 1925 titled, “The Use of Negro Man Power During War.” The study was conducted the previous decade using unscientific surveys and interviews with white officers who commanded African-American troops during WWI. In their obviously racist opinions, Negro soldiers were “irresponsible, careless, shiftless, secretive, superstitious, childlike, immoral, emotionally unstable, untruthful, and comic.” However, the report credited Negroes as “musically inclined with good rhythm and, if fed, loyal and compliant.” The findings were distributed to every commander in the Army.

The Tuskegee Experiment faced other obstacles, as well. The first hurdle was the War Department’s specification that the airfield at Tuskegee be constructed in just nine months, including runways, hangars, and buildings to house personnel. An African-American contractor took charge of the project and using a work force of 2,000 employees completed the project in just six months with a budget of \$1.66 million.

Overseeing construction was Major James Ellison. However, he was replaced by Col. Frederick von Kimble in January, 1942, who maintained segregationist practices at the field that the airmen resented. Within a year, Col. Noel Parrish took command and petitioned Washington to allow Tuskegee Airmen to serve in combat.

Parrish paid a visit to the all-white flight school at Montgomery, Alabama and told its commander, “We wash out better pilots at Tuskegee than you graduate here at Montgomery.” Parrish was correct. He was a white

career military man from Kentucky, but had been won over by the skills and dedication of his students. He supported the Tuskegee program 100%.

Another challenge was the Army’s decision that Tuskegee pilots would be placed in pursuit squadrons, the most difficult flying in which to become competent because it required mastering navigation, gunnery, and acrobatics.

“Tuskegee, Alabama was one of the worst places in the country for African-Americans,” according to Harvey. “The only way to avoid becoming a victim of the violence against blacks that took place in town was to stay on the post.”

The first aviation cadet class began in July, 1941. Training was completed nine months later. Out

of the 13 who started in the first class, five successfully completed the training including Capt. Benjamin O. Davis Jr., a West Point Academy graduate.

Following his graduation, Harvey remained at Tuskegee to check out in the P-40 aircraft before eventually being sent to Walterboro Field in South Carolina for combat training in an 18-cylinder, radial engine Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, one of the largest, heaviest fighters in the Air Corps. In April of 1945, he was combat ready and preparing to go to war. “I had my bags packed and was within one our of catching a train to Norfolk, Virginia to board a ship and join the Fighter Group when a message arrived with news that the war in Italy was over and would soon end throughout the European Theater. Harvey often quips, “Hitler knew I was coming, so he called it quits.”

Instead he was assigned to the 99th Fighter Squadron based at Godman Field, Kentucky. The War Department established the 99th Pursuit Squadron on January 16, 1941 to be an all black flying unit trained at Tuskegee.



*First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt after a plane ride on her visit to Tuskegee with Chief Flight Instructor Charles Anderson.*

The 99th FS became part of the 332nd Fighter Group that included the 100th, 301st, and 302nd, Fighter Squadrons. Initially 332nd FG pilots were given Curtiss P-40 Warhawk fighter-bomber aircraft, then Republic P-47 Thunderbolts (June–July, 1944), and later the North American P-51 Mustang (July, 1944).

The 99th was deployed to North Africa in April, 1943. “Normally troops were sent abroad in a convoy of ships with a Navy escort,” said Harvey. “But the 99th, with all of their crewmen and medical and administrative personnel, went on a single ship from Norfolk to Africa. At the time, the Germans controlled the Atlantic with their submarines, and their intelligence was very good. They undoubtedly knew the 99th was on that ship, but based on what they heard from white America the Germans concluded they would not be a threat.”

The 99th flew its first combat mission against the island of Pantelleria on June 2, 1943. Their efforts contributed to the island’s surrender on June 11. Despite this, their performance was criticized. According to Harvey, “One of the commanders from another P-40 outfit sent a damaging report to Washington, D.C. saying the 99th ‘couldn’t find their target, their attitude was poor, and their morale was poor.’ His letter climbed through the ranks with more commanders adding their two cents worth. All of it was negative.”

The dissent failed to note that the 99th was excluded from mission briefings, was intentionally based hundreds of miles from the front lines, and was flying older planes. With little investigation, Time Magazine joined the critics. Benjamin Davis, now a Colonel in command of the 99th, made a trip to Washington to refute the racially-motivated clatter

and express admiration for the “intelligence, skill, morale, and mannerism” of his airmen. As a result, the 99th was sent to Italy and joined the three other fighter squadrons comprising the 332nd FG of the 15th Air Force.

As critics continued to sharpen their rhetoric, the 332nd sharpened their skills. They flew in support of the invasion of Italy and joined in the air battle against Sicily beginning in June, 1944, and flew heavy bomber escort missions into Germany. On March 24, 1945 they flew escort on a 1,600-mile round trip to bomb a tank factory in Berlin in what was the 15th Air Force’s deepest mission of the war. Over Berlin they destroyed three German ME-262 jet fighters and damaged five additional jet fighters without losing any of the bombers or any of their fighters. For that achievement the 332nd received a Presidential Unit Citation. They also distinguished themselves in June, 1944, when two pilots discovered

a German torpedo boat in the harbor at Trieste, Italy. One of the pilots, using only his P-47’s 50-caliber machine guns, strafed the target causing it to explode and, ultimately, to be scuttled.

When the pilots of the all-black 332nd painted the tails of their P-51s bright red, the call sign “Red Tails” was coined. The Red Tails became so proficient that legend proclaimed the 332nd never lost a bomber under their protection. Before long, bomber pilots were requesting “Red Tail Angels” for particularly dangerous missions. Setting the record straight, Harvey cites their losses at 27 bombers all of which occurred during 7 of 179 total missions, for a loss of 3.9%. In comparison, white fighter groups were losing an average of 46 bombers per mission, with 10 to 12 airmen aboard each downed plane.

### ***The Aircraft of the 332nd Fighter Group:***

*Curtiss P-40 Warhawk  
Republic P-47 Thunderbolt  
North American P-51 Mustang “Red Tail”*



Statistics vary, but perhaps the most credible are reported at ourwwiveterans.com. In all, 992 pilots were trained in Tuskegee from 1941 to 1946. A total of 450 were deployed overseas, and 150 lost their lives in accidents or combat. The toll included 66 pilots killed in action or accidents, 84 killed in training and non-combat missions, and 32 captured as prisoners of war.

Tuskegee airmen flew 1,378 combat missions; 1,067 for the 12th Air Force and 311 for the 15th Air Force. The 332nd destroyed 112 enemy aircraft in the air and another 150 on the ground, and damaged an additional 148. They eliminated 950 rail cars, trucks, and other motor vehicles. They sank one torpedo boat and destroyed 40 other boats and barges.

Ninety-six Distinguished Flying Crosses were awarded to members of the 332nd Fighter Group or its squadrons, 88 to pilots. The 332nd was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation and, on March 29, 2007, during a ceremony inside the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol, President George W. Bush announced the award by Congress of the Congressional Gold Medal to the Tuskegee Airmen as a group, including Lt. Col. (ret.) James H. Harvey III.

When the 332nd Fighter Group returned from Europe and set foot on American soil, a top secret classification was placed on their operations. The unequaled success of African-American pilots and crew was kept hidden. It was 1995 before the top secret classification was lifted, which allowed the HBO movie titled, "The Tuskegee Airmen" to be released. Prior to that, history was mute when it came to Tuskegee Airmen and their wartime achievements.

In 1948, President Harry Truman signed Executive Order Number 9981, which required equal treatment and opportunity for all members of the armed forces, technically ending racial segregation in the military. One of the results of integration was that Harvey's all-black squadron was officially disbanded in 1949 as per Air Force Letter 35.3 that mandated black airmen be reassigned to formerly all-white units.

Although he did not see combat in WWII, Harvey was the military's first black jet fighter pilot to fly in Korean airspace. He served at Misawa Air Base in Japan where he flew an F-80 Shooting Star. When he arrived at his new unit the wing commander, who had never in his life seen a black pilot, naively asked, "So what should we call you?"

"How about Lieutenant Harvey," was his response.

In 1950, Harvey led a group of four F-80s in close support of a bomber mission three miles north of Yong-san, Korea that also became a strafing mission against enemy troops on the return trip. He was cited for "inflicting significant damage to enemy forces during inclement weather conditions." He became a Command Pilot with a Green Card Instrument Rating flying his F-80 on 126 missions in Korea.

During the remainder of his military career, Harvey served as a flight commander, a flying safety officer for the 27th NORAD Region, an instrument instructor pilot, a test pilot, an assistant group operations officer, operations officer of the 71st Fighter Interceptor Squadron flying the F-102A supersonic delta-wing fighter aircraft at Selfridge Air Force Base outside Detroit, Michigan, and a battle staff training officer for the commanding general of the North American Aerospace Defense Command.

Harvey retired on May 31, 1965 as a Lieutenant Colonel.

His awards and decorations include: Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with 10 Oak Leaf Clusters, Distinguished Unit Citation with 10 Oak Leaf Clusters, Good Conduct Medal, American Campaign Medal, World War II Vic-



*Lockheed F-80 Shooting Star, known as the first operational jet fighter in the U.S. Air Force.*

tory Medal, Army Occupation Medal (Japan), National Defense Service Medal, Korean Service Medal with 2 Bronze Stars, Air Force Longevity Service Award Ribbon with 4 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters, Air Force Reserve Medal, Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation, and United Nations Service Medal.

"I spent 22 years in the Army Air Corps and the United States Air Force and during that time I participated in several events that shaped fighter aircraft training. The aircraft I flew during my military career were: P-40, P-47, P-51, F-80, F-86A, E, F, and D, F-89, F-94, T-33 and the F-102A. The one I like the best was the F-102A, because it was the fastest aircraft I've ever flown.

"The highlight of my career was the fighter gunnery meet of 1949. I was a 1st Lieutenant in 1949 stationed at Lockbourne Air Force Base in Columbus, Ohio. In response to a directive from the Air Force, our Wing Commander, Col. Benjamin Davis Jr., announced that Capt. Alva Temple, 1st Lt. Harry Stewart, myself, and alternate pilot 1st Lt. Halbert L. Alexander would form a team to represent the 332nd in the first ever weapons meet to be held in May at Las Vegas Air Force Base. It was called



the 'United States Continental Gunnery Meet.' Its unofficial name was "Gunsmoke."

"We were the only active unit in the Air Force still flying P-47s. They were obsolete. The Air Force was getting rid of them and replacing them with jets. The Thunderbolts were going to the Air National Guard. When the 332nd was reactivated in 1947, after deactivation following WWII, P-47Ns were taken out of storage in Oklahoma City and brought to Lockbourne.

"The P-47N was the final model, developed specifically for long range flights. They had a souped-up engine, fuel tanks in the wings, autopilot, folding leather padded rudder paddles for resting ankles, and a range of 13 hours. "Just before the war in the Pacific Theater ended, I was scheduled to escort B-29s from Okinawa to the Japanese mainland," said Harvey.

"Our weapons meet competition at Las Vegas in 1949 would be against newer, faster, more maneuverable North American P-51 Mustangs and F-82 Twin Mustangs. Davis' parting remark to us was, 'If you don't win, don't come back.' He was joking, of course, and we all shared a chuckle. But we immediately knew this would be our opportunity to prove once and for all that we Tuskegee Airmen were the best of the best.

"When some of our competitors were overseen laughing at us upon landing our outclassed P-47s at Las Vegas, and for the fact our team of pilots and supporting ground crew were all black, we became even more determined. Temple, Stewart, and I flew every mission in the same three aircraft for one week. That's a tribute to our maintenance personnel."

The competitive events included aerial gunnery (shooting at a sleeve towed by a Douglas A-20 at 10,000 and 20,000 feet), dive bombing, skip bombing, rocket firing, and panel strafing a 10-by-10-foot target (panel set at a 60-degree angle on the ground. Competition began at 0600 to avoid desert heat thermals that could affect low-level flight.

"Because P-47s were designed as fighter bombers, they were particularly good at skip bombing. We had the most fun skip bombing, and amassed a perfect score. Three passes dropping two bombs per plane. You didn't guess at where to skip the bomb to hit the target. We didn't guess at anything—we were good," Harvey laughingly said. "We'd come in with our prop tips about a

foot off the ground, and the instant the target disappeared under the nose, we'd punch off the bomb. Let it go and pull up."

Harvey wasn't kidding about the low altitudes. One of the pilots grazed a station holding up the skip bombing target and ripped a hole in the

plane's belly. It had to be replaced by the team's alternate aircraft. Harvey credits their ground crew as equal winners of the competition. "Support crews competed against each other as well as the pilots. They kept our aircraft tuned for peak performance. We came back from our missions about noon, and the ground crews worked late every night getting us ready for the next morning."

Maintenance included harmonizing gun sights after every flight in case vibration or recoil had slightly displaced the guns. They were painstakingly bore-sighted and aligned to provide the exact bullet pattern each pilot wanted. "Our ground crews were so good that when they broke up our fighter group in 1949 and scattered us to squadrons all over the world, our wing commander,

Col. Davis, got more requests for maintenance people than he had. They were the best in the Air Force."

In the end, thanks to everyone's combined effort, the Tuskegee Airmen of the 332nd Fighter Group won the inaugural meet. The fighter weapons meet was a team competition, and there is no doubt that Harvey's team won the event, thus becoming

America's first Top Gun pilots. "We proved we were the best, and no one could dispute it. They could, however, see to it that we received no recognition for our accomplishment.

"A banquet was scheduled at the Flamingo, then



*Harvey's favorite aircraft, the 1,200 mph F-102A Delta Dagger.*



*North American F-82 Twin Mustang.*



the only hotel on what would become the 'Strip,' but it was cancelled. We were allowed around a table hastily set up with the winner's trophy. They took our picture then ushered us out. Instead of a banquet, a breakfast took place outside by the swimming pool the next morning. As for the three-foot silver trophy, it was mysteriously "lost."

Forty-six years later, in 1995, the missing trophy was discovered by historian Zellie Orr in a storeroom at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, and is now on permanent display in an alcove just inside the museum entrance. Its recovery was the result of a deathbed wish by Alva Temple. Sadly, he passed away just two hours before Orr arrived at his bedside with the news that his wish had been fulfilled.

Next was the issue of the annual Air Force almanac which always listed the 1949 winners as, "Unknown." Supporting paperwork verifying the moment in history was submitted to the Air Force and in April, 1995 the 332nd Fighter Group was finally listed as winners of the competition 46 years earlier. Two years later, in 1997, every member of the Tuskegee Airmen was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal.

Harvey retired from the military on May 31, 1965. On June 7th he went to work for Oscar Mayer at the home office in Madison, Wisconsin. The company, founded in 1883, is famous for its hot dogs and cold cuts. After initial training he moved to New Jersey as a sales representative.

In 1968, he was promoted to district manager of the Detroit, Michigan Distribution Center. A year later he became assistant sales manager at the Oscar Mayer plant in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In 1972, he was promoted to Distribution Center Manager in Denver, Colorado, responsible for a four-state region.

Harvey retired in 1980 with the distinction of having been Oscar Mayer's first black distribution center manager. Summing up his civilian career Harvey said, "I had a good job and I loved it."



*Capt. Alva Temple (left), 1st Lt. Harry Stewart, 1st Lt. James Harvey III, and 1st Lt. Halbert L. Alexander (right).*

Harvey is father to four girls; Debra, Kathy, Cynthia, and Alysyn with wife Marilyn who he married in 1947. They were together for 27 years before her death. Sometime later he married Pearlle and was married to her for 36 years before she passed away in 2014. He lives

in Lakewood with daughter Kathy, and is an active member of Lakewood Post 178 of The American Legion.

For Harvey, finally having the gunnery meet trophy on display and his team listed in the Air Force almanac was only a partial victory. He connected with Denver-based Wish of a Lifetime Foundation and expressed his desire for a plaque to be placed at Nellis AFB recognizing the 332nd's victory. On January 22, 2022, Harvey attended a ceremony at Nellis to unveil the new plaque bearing the names Alva Temple, Harry Stewart, and James H Harvey III.

"I've been telling the story of how Tuskegee Airmen became America's first Top Guns for 26 years. I can finally close the chapter. Now I need another project."

That may be convincing management at the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas to name a suite in honor of Tuskegee Airmen and prominently display an enlargement in the lobby of the photo taken at the hotel of the trophy with its 1949 African-American winners.

Much of Harvey's retirement time has been spent traveling and speaking to various groups about his experiences. In particular he enjoys talking to youth about the importance of education and encouraging their pursuit of opportunities in aviation.

He's an energetic fundraiser for Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., begun in 1975. The charitable, inspirational, and educational organization awards merit-based national scholarships to high school graduates.

"There are 40 scholarships a year now," Harvey said. Over \$1.7 million has been raised to date, with \$60,000 in scholarship awards being presented each year.

The organization boasts a membership of over 2,000 in 44 chapters. Its mission is "to introduce young people across the nation to the world of aviation and science through social and educational activities."

As he approaches 100 years of age, Harvey has never been more appreciated for his service to America or more in demand to appear at occasions to honor him. He is Colorado's last living Tuskegee Airman. He was the guest of honor in April, 2022 at a wreath-laying ceremony to honor Tuskegee Airmen at the U.S. Air Force Academy. He rode down Constitution Avenue in D.C. as the grand marshal of America's 2022 Memorial Day Parade. More honors were paid to him during a gathering in Washington, D.C. in September marking the 75th anniversary of the United States Air Force.

"Dealing with segregation wasn't easy," admits Harvey. "But it only made me stronger. I refused to believe I couldn't do something because of the color of my skin. There was nothing for me to address because they had the problem, I didn't."

He says everything in life is about attitude, and that he personally doesn't have any bitterness about the

hardships he and others faced as Tuskegee Airmen. He credits the success he's had in life because he focused on what he had control over instead of what other people did, said, or thought.

"We were forerunners in the Civil Rights Movement. I want others to use our struggles and triumphs as motivation to strive for their goals and aspirations. Regardless of your economic status in life if you can believe it, you can achieve it.

"Choose to not think of yourself as a victim no matter what hardship or injustice comes your way. Always strive to be the best. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do something. If you set your mind to a thing you can do it. In this wonderful, free country of America, all your dreams can become reality."

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*Top Gun winners of the first ever "United States Continental Gunnery Meet."  
1st Lt. Halbert L. Alexander (left) , 1st Lt. James Harvey III, Capt. Alva Temple, and 1st Lt. Harry Stewart (right).*