

H-Net Reviews

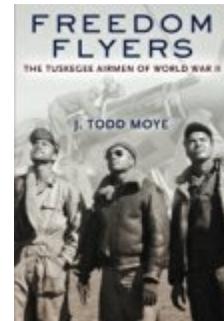
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

J. Todd Moyer. *Freedom Flyers: The Tuskegee Airmen of World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. 256 pp. \$17.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-989655-4.

Reviewed by Daniel Haulman (Air Force Historical Research Agency)

Published on H-War (April, 2012)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



Haulman on Moyer

J. Todd Moyer's *Freedom Flyers: The Tuskegee Airmen of World War II* is the best book yet written about the total experience of the Tuskegee Airmen, the first African American or black pilots in the Army Air Forces, and their support personnel. Skillfully written by a scholar who includes extensive notes, this book is solidly based not only on extensive primary sources but also on hundreds of oral history interviews that the author conducted as head of the National Park Service's Tuskegee Airmen Oral History Project.

Moyer includes much important information about the missions of the Tuskegee Airmen in combat overseas, which included members of the 99th Fighter Squadron and the 332d Fighter Group and its three other squadrons. Those Tuskegee Airmen flew tactical missions for the Twelfth Air Force and then escorted bombers for the Fifteenth Air Force on raids deep into enemy territory. But Moyer does not neglect the Tuskegee Airmen who never went overseas, including members of the 477th Bombardment Group and its four squadrons. He also includes the many black Army Air Forces personnel who were not pilots, such as the members of ground crews or bomber crews, who trained at bases beyond Tuskegee.

The book is valuable not only for its wealth of information about the Tuskegee Airmen groups and squadrons, but also for placing them in the broader context of American history, including the sociological and political forces that pressured the War Department and the Army Air Corps, and later the Army Air Forces, to

include blacks among its pilots, not only for fighters but also for bombers. The book begins with the origins of flight training for black men before World War II and carries the story through and beyond the war to the racial integration of the Air Force, noting the irony that a service that resisted the inclusion of blacks among its aviators and officers later led the way in integrating the Armed Forces and contributing eventually to the racial integration of American society.

Moyer is scrupulously objective, bringing out not only absurd and blatant instances of white racism, such as that which provoked the Freeman Field Mutiny in 1945, but also instances in which white officers such as Colonel Noel Parrish, commander of Tuskegee Army Air Field, struggled against the traditions around them to give the black airmen and their support personnel more opportunities in the Army Air Forces. But this is a book primarily about black men and their individual experiences. They struggled against many odds, not only for their own success, but also for the success of their white countrymen and for the successful defense of their country, despite the fact that the country continued to discriminate against them.

Moyer's book clearly brings out the Tuskegee Airmen's place in American history and even corrects some myths that appeared in previous books on the subject. *Freedom Flyers* is not perfect, and there are a few historical errors, but they are few and far between. The book would have been even better if its author had relied a lit-

tle more on the documentary resources of the Air Force Historical Research Agency, which maintains the original records of the Tuskegee Airmen units, written by the Tuskegee Airmen themselves during the war. They are at least as reliable as the memories of original Tuskegee Airmen with whom he conducted so many interviews.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

Citation: Daniel Haulman. Review of Moye, J. Todd, *Freedom Flyers: The Tuskegee Airmen of World War II*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. April, 2012.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=35418>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.