

BILLIE ROWE'S NOTEBOOK

BLACK WINGS: THE ERA OF CHANGE

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The 332nd Fighter Group, commanded by Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., came out of WW-II with an enviable record. There was never a U.S. bomber shot down while flying under its protection. To the German fighter pilots they were "schwarzfliegern," loosely translated means "black flyers." To the white American bomber pilots, the 332nd escorts were a guaranteed ticket home. That record, according to Davis, who later became America's first black Air Force general, in a large measure gave President Truman the ammunition to order a desegregation of the military. He recalled that the Air Force did so within months after the order. A move made easier by our prowess in combat. "It took the Army Corps until Vietnam and maybe the Navy hasn't done it yet," said the now retired general.

There are those who believe that the 332nd was born out of the 99th Pursuit Squadron which was originally created to take in Davis, Jr. He was denied entry into flight school when he graduated from West Point in 1936. Then he was flatly told that the Air Corps didn't have any black flying units nor plans for any in the foreseeable future. However, in 1941 President Franklin Roosevelt

directed the War Department to create a black Fighter Squadron. This is a story which began in the glory of struggle. It is one which ended with a record that is so distinguished, it successfully blotted out those lines of separation which raised unequal barriers before all members of America's Fighting Forces.

Though black airmen fought and died in WW-II, as a group they did not make significant inroads into aviation after the conflict. The armed forces remained segregated and they were seldom represented in the aviation and air transport industries. The signing of Executive Order 9981 by President Harry S. Truman, July 26, 1948, signaled an important change which opened the door for the eventual integration of a variety of military aviation corps. This is credited with opening the doors through which many blacks were assimilated into the aeronautical community. Their WW-II record was the key to greater opportunities in military aviation during the Korean and Vietnam wars. The Air Force set the pace for the integration of blacks onto all levels of management and operations. The Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, to a lesser degree, also provided opportunities.

In the commercial

air, blacks traditionally held blue-collar service jobs as skycaps and ground handlers, but were generally excluded from the cockpits or holding key administrative jobs. With the exception of August H. Martin, a commercial transport pilot who was hired by Seaboard World Airlines in '55, and Perry H. Young, Jr., a helicopter pilot taken on by New York Airways in '58, black pilots were all but unknown in commercial aviation in the 50s and 60s. In '65, Marlon D. Green won a long court battle over the right to a job as a commercial pilot. As a result of his case, blacks began to make significant strides toward breaking down the bias barriers of the airline industry. In concluding this series we did call United, Eastern, Delta and American for information on black pilots. So far we only got information from Pan-Am where there is one black training pilot captain, one regular line pilot captain, eleven (11) black co-pilots and two black flight engineers.

HEADLINERS: The deft write hand of Alex Haley and the artful camera eyes of Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe have brought to life the plight of "A way of life changes on Daufuskie Island. This small black enclave, unaltered for centuries, faces the threat-and-promise of development." The camera of the one and the pen of the other captures the pathos and the chaos on the

pages of the slick Smithsonian mag., of a people in turmoil on this last of the South Carolina black island enclave ... Luke Walker looks upon his selection to portray Anwar Sadat in the up-scheduled '83 TV mini series as the break his talent has been praying for ... Sam Jackson's accomplishments were many, but his yrs were too few. Because of what he did for others he will be long remembered and warmly regarded ... Gordon Parks, of the multiple talents, is packing for a trip to Africa where he will be directing his next flick ... Alex Haley, whose "Roots" grew greater respect for Afro-Americans and taller ratings for teevee, is preparing a mini TV-series based on the life of Madam C.J. Walker. She was the cosmetic queen, who became the first known black millionaire. He made the announcement at the highly successful EDGES 10th annual luncheon, where he was awarded the annual Ruth Allen King Award. He also told Roscoe Lee Brown, who was in attendance, that so far, he's the only artist already cast. The EDGES' event put that org. way out front as the number one in the Apple. With Dr. James Barringer again luncheon ch'person, its affair lived up to the hi-standard established by its initial event. Personable superstar Bryant Gumble, who co-an-

chors NBC-TV's Today Show, emceed. Elton H. Rule, prez-CO ABC, intro'd Haley whose warm, down to basic

talk spiced a super celebration ... STAY LOOSE ... Billy Rowe is a syndicated columnist.

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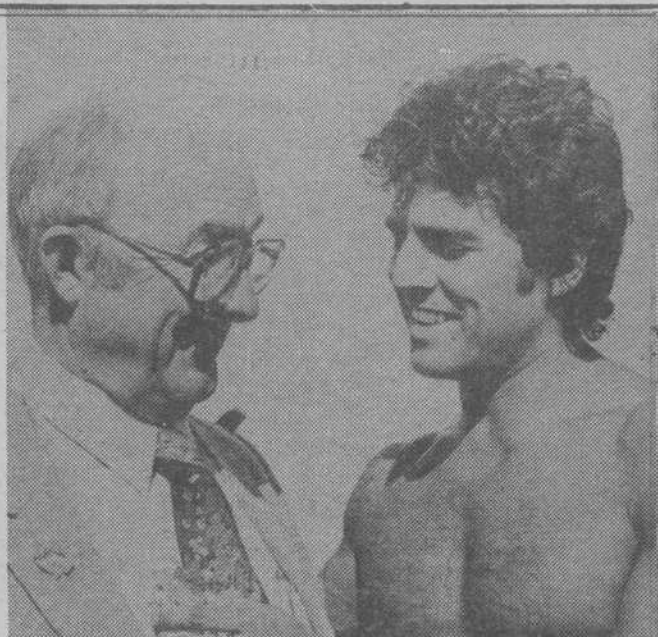
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