

Tuskegee Airmen in World War II, Photographs, ca. 1943 (page 1 of 3)



Ralph H. Davis was born in East Providence on February 5, 1915. He had four brothers and a sister; the family lived on Vine Street for many years. His passion for aviation began in his early years while working on his uncle's farm near the original Providence Airport, just over the state line in Seekonk, at what is now an industrial park at the intersection of Route 6 and Industrial Way. As a youngster who would do odd jobs at the airport and run errands for pilots; sometimes his reward (or payment) would be an airplane ride. By 1939 he had accumulated enough hours to obtain a Rhode Island private pilot's license, which he kept active for some 55 years.

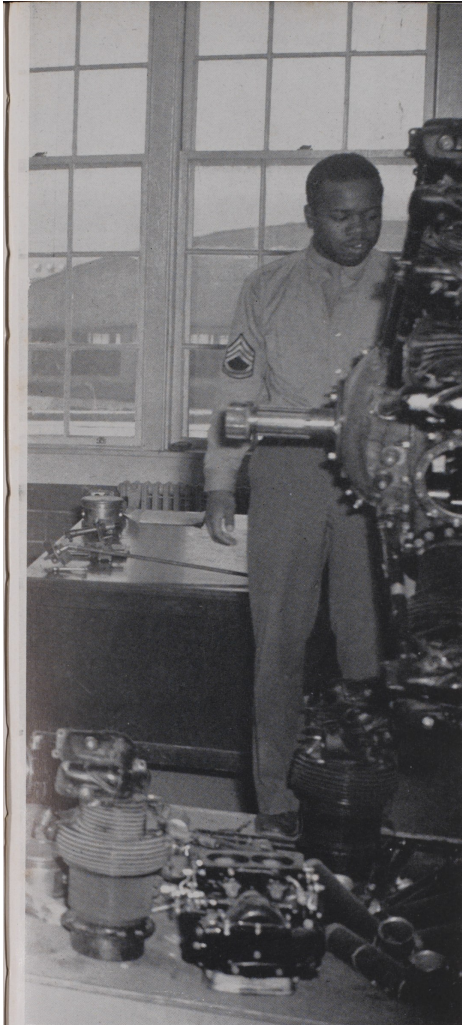
Davis enlisted in the Army Air Corps in November of 1941. Despite his pilot's license, he was not accepted into military pilot training because of the strict formal education requirements imposed on aviation cadets. He was instead sent to Chanute Field in Rantoul, Illinois, where a few months earlier the 99th Pursuit Squadron had been activated. This was the first African-American flying unit ever formed in the US military. Some 250 enlisted men were trained at Chanute in aircraft ground support trades, in preparation for the aircraft and pilots to come. One of those men was Ralph Davis, who was trained in MOS 750, Airplane Maintenance Technician.

Over the next four years, Davis rose to the rank of Staff Sergeant, serving with several units at Tuskegee, including the 889th Basic Training Flying Squadron and the 2143rd AAF Base Unit. He serviced airplanes, taught others to service airplanes, and even assisted in pilot check-outs. Later in life, he told his family that he had flown often during those days, especially in the AT-6 toward the end of the war. He was discharged from the service on November 19, 1945.

Citation: Photograph (ca. 1943) and biography of Ralph Davis, Ralph Hickman Davis Papers, 1943–2021, Accession 50284, Library of Virginia.

PRIMARY SOURCES FOR EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

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You can't play these instruments.



CLASSES ★



Left: Complications galore for the machine medicos in engine class. Below: This is an armament class, where the hidden mysteries of war tools are carefully solved . . . blindfolded.

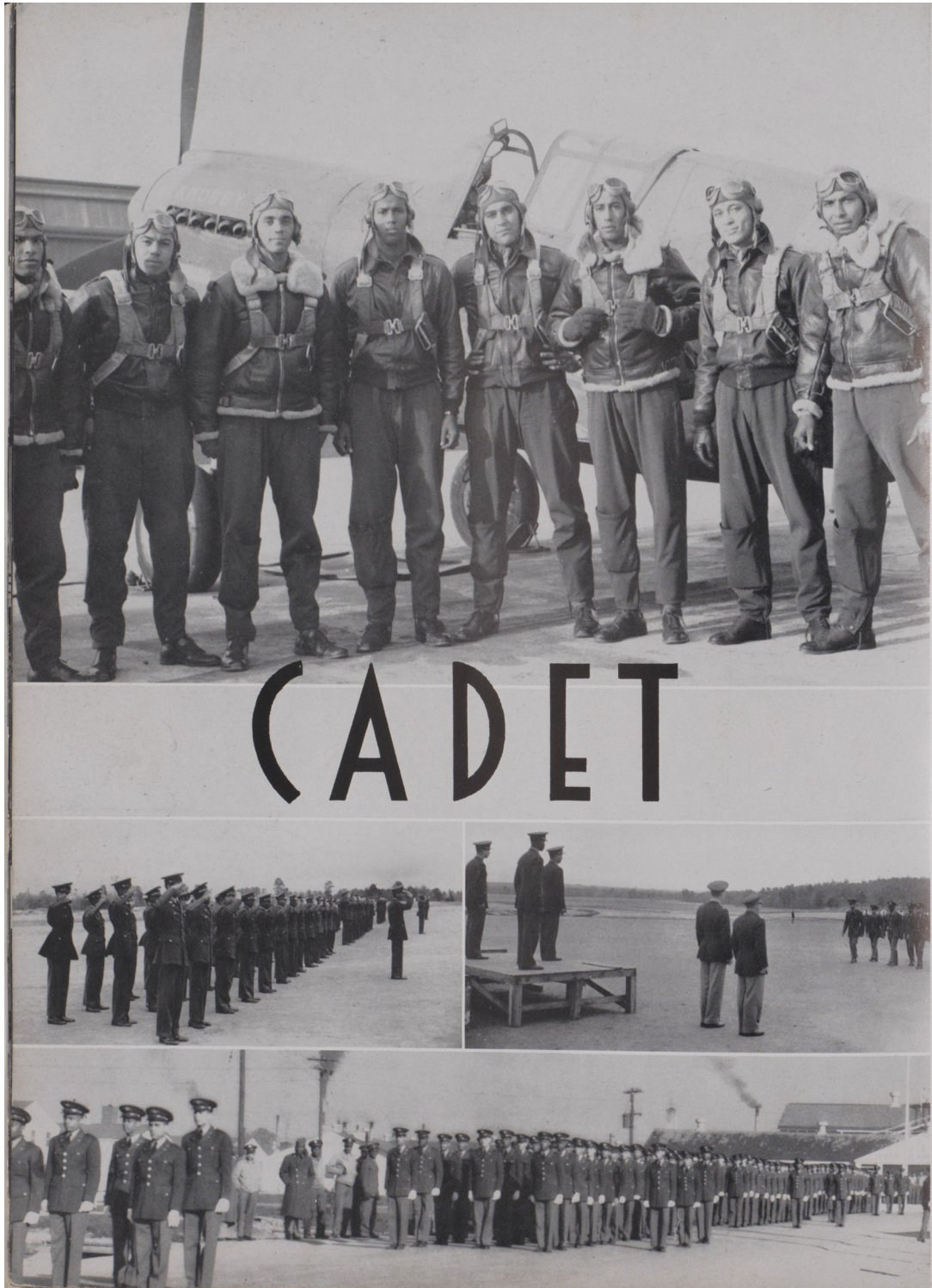


They're all in a whirl . . . a propeller class.



Citation: Photographs of training classes and cadet life published in Tuskegee Army Flying School and AAF 66th FTD Yearbook (ca. 1943), Ralph Hickman Davis Papers, 1943–2021, Accession 50284, Library of Virginia.

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