



Buist Academy

Gerrita Postlewait, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Cynthia Ambrose
Deputy Superintendent of Learning
Services

Michelle Simmons
Executive Director
Elementary Learning Community

Shawntay White
Principal

For Immediate Release
November 20, 2018

Contact:
Shawntay White 843-724-7261

Media Release

History Comes Alive at Buist Academy with Tuskegee Airmen

Charleston, S.C. - A documented original Tuskegee Airmen, Dr. Eugene J. Richardson, Jr. and flight instructor, Retired Col. Robert Hughes, spoke to Buist Academy students last week. They both served during the World War II era.

The Tuskegee Airmen formed the 332nd Fighter Group and the 477th Bombardment Group of the United States Air Force from 1940-1948. They were the first African-American military aviators in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Dr. Richardson became interested in flight as a young boy in 1930 when his father and a friend took him along to see the Colored Air Circus, a group of Black aviators performing an air show in Mansfield, OH. Driven by a pure interest to fly; he decided to join the Army Air Corps to become a pilot.

At the age of 18, he went to Keesler Field in Mississippi for three months of basic training. From there he went to Tuskegee for 40 weeks of training.

Tuskegee held the civilian contract for pilot training for the Army Air Corps at that time and had 42 Black civilian instructors.

White trainees went to different bases for their 10-week training segments. The Black aviators stayed at Tuskegee for all 40 weeks.

After Tuskegee, Richardson went to Eglin, SC for gunnery training and then to Walterboro, SC for combat training. In Walterboro, Richardson learned to fly P-40 and P-47 aircraft. He and 37 others finished their flight training in March 1945; however, the war ended in the European Theatre just two months later, so they never saw any combat.

He was not sorry about that.

"I did not want to go kill anybody or get killed," Richardson said. "I just wanted to fly."

Of the 38 pilots in his class, 23 including Richardson graduated as fighter pilots and 15 as B-25 bomber pilots. His most memorable experiences as a pilot were his

first solo flight, the first formation flight, and the completion of his first simulated combat mission.

Dr. Richardson was discharged from the Air Force in July 1946. He did not pursue a career in aviation. Instead, he returned to Philadelphia where he finished his high school degree at Temple High School. He went to college at Temple University for his undergraduate studies and earned his master's degree and Doctor of Education at Penn State. He pursued a successful career in education in the Philadelphia school system.

"There was nowhere for a black aviator to go in the United States – only Tuskegee," Richardson said. "The color of your skin has nothing to do with how the brain functions. As we proved, men of color can fly and they can fly quite well."

Col. Robert Hughes is a former pilot instructor. In 1944 he was sent to Tuskegee Army Air Field as a Single Engine Fight Instructor to help train Tuskegee Airmen at the Tuskegee Air Force Base in Alabama. He was one of the first eleven original flight instructors.

Although Col. Hughes is white, he experienced the effects of racial segregation during his time in the United States Air Force. The Tuskegee Air Force Base was segregated, so he could not live on the base. Additionally, as soon as he completed his training tour, he had to leave the base because he was white.

Hughes continued his career in the Air Force and served in the following locations: in 1946, he was stationed at Randolph Air Field to teach flying to Chinese and Turkish students; in 1947 he transferred overseas to Okinawa and flew P-51 fighter aircraft; in 1965 he flew Spy in the Sky missions out of Turkey.

In 1965, he retired as Lt. Col. and moved to Florida where he built single-family homes and sold real estate.

For information about this visit to Buist Academy, contact the school's literacy coach, Yvonne Murray, at yvonne_murray@charleston.k12.sc.us.

###

About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is the second largest school system in South Carolina representing a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools that span 1,000 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 86 schools and specialized programs. With approximately 6,100 employees district-wide, CCSD is the fourth largest employer in the region.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, charter, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), and Montessori schools, and is divided into three Learning Communities. Options include specialized programs in science, engineering and mathematics; liberal arts; music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military and other public service enterprises.