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THE TUSKEGEE EXPERIMENT  
THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN TOOLBOOK (UPDATE)

A Research Paper

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## *Preface*

There continues to exist a need to search for and understand characteristics which make leaders effective. The world is currently undergoing rapid changes in the realm of information and technology; however, these changes don't obviate the need for effective leadership. These "revolutions" make effective leadership even more critical. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize the importance of examining effective leadership skills utilized in the past in an effort to better prepare leaders of today, and more importantly, tomorrow. The Tuskegee Airmen ToolBook provides an opportunity to examine the leadership involved with the controversial Tuskegee Experiment through the use of a technology-based case study on leadership. This update reflects changes to the ToolBook which include incorporation of a leadership focus, addition of a tutorial, and improvements in the navigational aspects of the ToolBook to make the ToolBook more "user friendly."

As with any major project, this research is the sum of the efforts put forth not only by the members of the research team, but by many individuals outside the research team. The team is grateful to these individuals for lending their support and assistance toward the development and production of this project. First, we would like to offer our most sincere gratitude and appreciation to Major William "Clark" Kent, USAF, ACSC/DEC, for his insight and guidance as our Air Command and Staff College Faculty Research Advisor. His direction and sound feedback on the project kept us focused and enabled

timely achievement of milestones. Second, we would like to thank Colonel Roosevelt Lewis, USAF (Ret), Fixed Base Operator, Air Tuskegee, Tuskegee, Alabama. Colonel Lewis provided essential reference material during the initial research and development phase of the project. Third, we would like to express our gratitude to Lt Col Nancy Perry, USAF and LCDR Arlo Guthrie, USN, ACSC/DTA, for assistance in resolving technical problems associated with producing this ToolBook. Fourth, we would like to thank Senior Airman Tonya Suttles, USAF, of the Air University Public Affairs Office, who eloquently read the script for the new sections of the ToolBook and provided valuable insight regarding styles and presentation. Fifth, we would be remiss if we failed to acknowledge our loving spouses and children for their patience and understanding during the many hours this project kept us away from them. Finally, we want to thank God for His wisdom, strength, and endurance for making the experience of developing and producing this ToolBook so enjoyable, educational, and enriching to our lives and hopefully to those that use it.

### *Abstract*

Effective leadership is critical to the military; it promotes unit cohesion and teamwork--key factors to unit success. This daunting task of leading a “fighting unit” is exacerbated when forces internal and external to the military place obstacles in one’s path. Certainly, one of the challenges of a leader is to overcome obstacles or adverse situations in accomplishing its assigned mission and thus meet the security need of the country. The Tuskegee Experiment is an example of effective leadership in the face of adversity. The experiment is a testimony of moral courage, where young black airmen served their country extremely well despite the “second class” treatment they received. The Tuskegee Airmen proved that the measure of merit is performance. Their leaders demonstrated several leadership characteristics that will forever stand the test of time.

In the past, U. S. political leaders have used the military as a test for controversial social experiments because the military reflected a large group of individuals under the politicians’ direct control. Lessons learned from these experiments were later expanded to the rest of the general public. Segregation as well as integration of blacks were examples of experiments first conducted within the military. Other experiments included women's rights issues, and more recently, the campaign for a smoke-free work environment. For each of these examples, the ideas were first experimented within the military before expansion to the rest of society.

The leadership shown during social experiments has had an enormous impact on the values of the larger society. By studying the leadership issues surrounding the Tuskegee Airmen Experiment, leaders involved with social experiments will gain better *situational awareness* and understanding of the impact of effective leadership on the overall outcome of the experiment. This research project provides a historical summary of the Tuskegee Experiment and examines the leaders involved with the experiment. The intent of this project is to generate meaningful thought and discussion on the leadership skills of the people involved with this controversial experiment.

This research project contains an interactive multimedia software program called, ToolBook, which presents the history of the Tuskegee Airmen Experiment and the results of a leadership study. The ToolBook improves on a previous research effort which captured the essentials of the historical account of the experiment. Research methodology consisted of literature research, personal interviews, and use of “The 10 Propositions of Leadership,” an Air Command and Staff College student research project. The paper that accompanies the ToolBook is a summary of the importance of the study and a synopsis of the results.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*It has been well said that the first responsibility of leadership is to keep hope alive. A leader, to be successful, must do what it takes to keep hope alive in the organization which he heads. That means articulating a clear, compelling statement of the shared mission of the organization and assuring that 'the led' are inspired to achieve it. Nothing else a leader does or can do is more important.*

—Jim Vickery

A renewed emphasis is being placed on identifying characteristics of effective leadership. As the quote above indicates, it is the responsibility of the leader to set the pace in the organization. The test of adversity is where a leader's potential and personal values are actually brought forth, thereby, producing a character that inspires the confidence and trust of those expected to follow. In a changing environment with conflicting expectations caused by diversity in our armed forces, unrealistic societal expectations and continual conflict, the military is in desperate need of strong, courageous leaders. The Tuskegee Experiment is an example of effective leadership in the face of adversity. The experiment is a testimony of moral courage. It is proof that the measure of merit is *performance*. The Tuskegee Experiment demonstrated several leadership characteristics that will forever stand the test of time.

The Tuskegee Airmen Experiment was a program used by certain politicians to prove that blacks did not have the technical aptitude nor fortitude to fly airplanes. At a

time of pervasive racism and segregation, the renown black pilots widely known as the Tuskegee Airmen, used these obstacles as opportunities to demonstrate “excellence.” Their sterling record of accomplishments during the war affirmed their adopted motto: “the measure of merit is performance.”<sup>1</sup>

The Tuskegee Airmen ToolBook is a multimedia project designed to capture the experiences of the Tuskegee Airmen and highlight the important leadership lessons learned from the experiment. The ToolBook is composed of three major sections: History, Leadership, and the Future. A brief description of these three sections is provided in the following chapters.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Roosevelt Lewis, Colonel, USAF, (Ret), interview with author, 4 January 1997.

## **Chapter 2**

### **History**

The history section of the ToolBook contains two versions of the history. The first version contains a 10-minute historical overview narrated by Lt Colonel Herbert Carter, one of the original Tuskegee Airmen. The second version is a more detailed historical account the Experiment. This version outlines events that led to the experiment as well as events that occurred during the experiment. The Pre-Experiment section covers the secret study of “The Use of Negro Manpower in War” conducted by the Department of War which concluded that the Negro man was immoral, mentally inferior to whites, profoundly superstitious, and had less capacity for learning. The Negro was considered a rank coward in the dark.<sup>1</sup> This section also covers the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) which was a turning point for many black aviators; it paved the way for blacks to begin participation in aviation on a wider scale than had previously been allowed. In addition to the Department of War Study and the CPTP, this section also covers Public Law 18 which authorized the funding appropriation for training Negro pilots. The Experiment section contains four main sub-sections. The first sub-section, the “Early Days,” includes the activation of the squadrons, the selection of the members, and the pilot training program. The second sub-section, “Organization,” focuses primarily on the interrelationships between the different squadrons and the equipment used in support of

their missions. The third sub-section, “Combat Ready” covers the performance of the Tuskegee Airmen in combat. The final sub-section in the Experiment section, “Accomplishments,” highlights the numerous achievements and awards earned by the Tuskegee Airmen for their superb performance in combat. The ToolBook closes with a brief discussion on the legacy of the airmen and offers some final thoughts by General “Chappie” James.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Report of the Army War College, “The Use of Negro Manpower in War,” October 1925.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Leadership**

“The 10 Propositions of Leadership,” a 1996 research project requested by the Air Force Chief of Staff, is a state-of-the-art tool for examining and applying leadership principles. Each of the propositions provided by that research project will be used as a backdrop to investigate the good and bad qualities of key leaders involved with the Tuskegee Experiment.

A brief description of each proposition and an assessment of the leadership involved with the experiment are provided below.

#### **Proposition 1: Vision**

*Leaders that chart a vision prepare themselves and their organization for the challenges of tomorrow.*

Focus: 332nd Fighter Group

The 332nd Fighter Group had a clear vision of equality which allowed them to persevere and overcome the many obstacles to achieve their goal. Their vision was one of excellence, as evidenced by their performance; certainly consistent with the current Air Force core value of “excellence” in all we do.

## **Proposition 2: Character**

*Character is the cornerstone of leadership—it fosters trust and increases the leader's effectiveness.*

Leader: Judge William H. Hastie

Judge William H. Hastie personified three pillars of character essential to leadership; his personal commitment to integrity, his selfless nature, and his enduring passion for his mission. The characteristics ensured trust was prevalent throughout the War Department. This contributed substantially to the effectiveness of the integration of blacks into the Army.

## **Proposition 3: Resiliency**

*Resiliency in leadership alleviates the impact of adversity, combats chaos, and fosters flexibility.*

Leader: Lt Gen Benjamin O. Davis, Jr.

Successful leaders don't fall apart in the face of adversity, falter when disruptions arise, or fail to adapt when change is necessary. Lt Gen Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. is an excellent example of someone who overcame seemingly insurmountable obstacles to become a truly great leader.

## **Proposition 4: Relationships**

*Leaders build and rely on multifaceted internal and external relationships.*

Leader: Eleanor Roosevelt

Eleanor Roosevelt used her extensive interpersonal network to influence many prominent leaders into supporting the black aviators. Her intervention eventually led to broadened opportunities for blacks.

## **Proposition 5: Accountability**

*Leadership demands accountability to superiors, peers and subordinates alike.*

Leader: Colonel Noel F. Parrish

Part of being accountable implies that a leader take responsibility, and to take decisive action when needed. Colonel Noel Parrish demonstrated accountability as he focused on alleviating the harsh impact on segregation practices within the Army Air Corps. As a result of his efforts, the social life and morale of his soldiers improved.

## **Proposition 6: Mentoring**

*The law of sowing and reaping: Learning and mentoring yield a harvest of personal growth and organizational development.*

Leader: Charles “Chief” Alfred Anderson

Under the mentorship of Chief Anderson, hundreds of blacks learned to fly and became very successful in combat, making significant contributions toward the evolution of airpower.

## **Proposition 7: Critical Thinking**

*Thinking critically and creatively is a key to problem solving. Hence, thinking is a hallmark of leadership.*

Leader: G. L. Washington

G. L. Washington faced many obstacles in his struggle to convince the authorities to select Tuskegee as a site for the Civil Pilot Training Program, and ultimately, he was eventually successful.

## **Proposition 8: Wisdom**

*Wisdom provides a broad, balanced leadership perspective from which sound decisions are made.*

Leader: Colonel Robert Selway

One way to study this proposition is to see what happens when decisions are made in an apparent “wisdom vacuum.” Col Robert Selway, Commander of the 477th Bombardment Group (Medium), began a series of unwise decisions when he opted to segregate clubs at Freeman Field, Indiana.

## **Proposition 9: Values**

*The leader is responsible for communicating values.*

Leader: General George C. Marshall

General George C. Marshall’s ability to clearly communicate his values earned the respect and trust of those around him.

## **Proposition 10: Shaping Culture**

*Leadership is responsible for shaping the culture—assessing and transforming it when needed.*

Focus: Tuskegee Airmen Incorporated (TAI)

The goal of the TAI, formed in 1972, is to motivate, inspire and stimulate today's youth to aspire, seek and achieve successful careers in aerospace and aviation fields. The Tuskegee Airmen believed that the best way to shape and transform a culture is to start with its youth.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Future**

As reflected by the leadership portrayed in the Tuskegee Experiment, the measure of merit is, in fact, performance. The men in this experiment were successful because they were determined, committed, and courageous leaders, who worked toward a common vision--a vision for a better society. The legacy left to the men and women following them is a testament of their service before self. The leadership skills demonstrated by these men can serve as model leadership practices for others to emulate. By studying the leadership issues surrounding the Tuskegee Experiment, current and future leaders will have a better understanding of how best to handle complex social issues which impact the military. These leaders will also gain an appreciation for the importance of proactive, just leadership in shaping the outcome.

### **Conclusion**

The focus of this ToolBook is to assess both good and bad characteristics of key leaders involved in the experiment using “The 10 Propositions of Leadership” to examine these characteristics. These propositions reinforce the position that the same leadership characteristics: vision, character, resiliency, relationships, accountability, mentoring, critical thinking, wisdom, values, and shaping culture applied by the leaders in the

Tuskegee Experiment are applicable to today's leaders and the future leaders of tomorrow.

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