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Black History

AN AMERICAN STORY

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Tuskegee Airmen Fought the Enemy in Nazi Held Europe

BY COLONEL LEE ARCHER

February is Black History month and the lessons that were carved out of the carnage of World War II remain very much relevant to the African-American of the 21st Century.

In the segregated society of the 1940s, the vast majority of patriotic African-Americans were relegated to non-combat tasks that ranged from graves registration to stevedores. It literally took a Presidential order to mandate that African-American combat units, albeit, segregated ones, be allowed to take the fight to the enemy.

The most dramatic example of their success was found among the Tuskegee Airmen, fighter pilots who trained in the heart of segregated America, Tuskegee, Alabama. Giventired, obsolete fighters, often shackled to indifferent, even hostile white superior officers, we were sent to confront the battle hardened pilots of Nazi Germany's dreaded Luftwaffe. Yet despite the obstacles, including segregation at home and



Colonel Lee Archer is seated in a replica of the original P-51 Mustang that was used to down five enemy aircraft during World War II.

sudden death in the air, we confronted a two front war and defeated both enemies to the human spirit. Tenacity of the Tuskegee Airmen in combat ensured that no American bomber fell to enemy fighters while entrusted to their escort.

The Tuskegee Airmen taught our society that change is not only possible, but inevitable. We triggered a series of events that led to the desegregation of the United States military, that in turn set the stage for the seismic civil rights struggles of the 1960s.

The battles waged by the Tuskegee Airmen in the air war against Nazi fighters are long over. Black History month teaches us that our nation's struggle to be a true equal opportunity society was made possible, in part, through the "air cover" provided by the Tuskegee Airmen.

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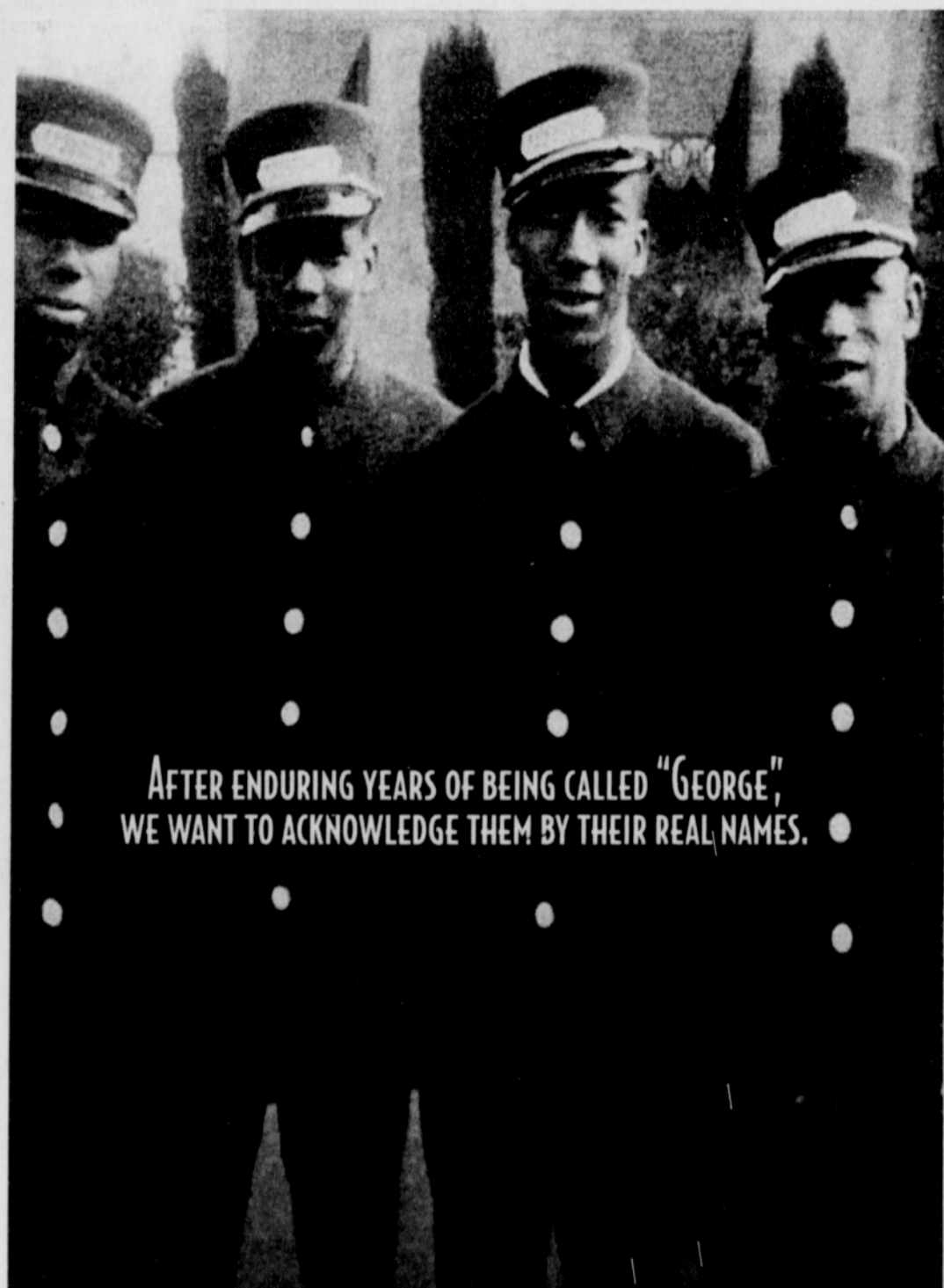
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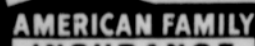
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"If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all. And so today I still have a dream."


Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,
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Black History Month


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