



“Spit Fire” -- “Red Tails” -- “Black Bird Men”

Wickliffe’s Tuskegee Airman: Earl R. Lane

In WWII, the Tuskegee Airmen flew 15,533 sorties on 1,578 missions. 55 of these flyers downed 112 German planes in the last 2 years of the war. They were the first **African American pilots in US Military Service**, and the only ones in service during WWII. To some extent these pilots fought two wars: one overseas, and the other being racism on the home front. Their story and that of Lt. Earl R. Lane from Wickliffe, Ohio, are one and the same.



Earl Roscoe Lane is known for many things. was born in Redbird, Oklahoma, an African American town formed after



the Civil War to enable freed slaves to live in economic independence and dignity. His family moved to Wickliffe when he was age ten. As a young man, Earl enrolled at Adelbert College (Case Western Reserve University), graduated with a degree from John Marshall School of Law, and worked for Cuyahoga County as a social worker. He was a probation officer and worked for the welfare department, including as deputy chief until his retirement in 1979. His WWII service flag is visible on a telephone pole in his hometown. But unknown to most of Lake County’s residents is this fact - Earl Lane was a war hero and member of the **99th Fighter Squadron**. He was the only Tuskegee Airman from our county, and he was a pioneer in the integration of the U.S. Armed Forces.



The era of the **Tuskegee Airmen**, a **Franklin D. Roosevelt** initiative, mainly covered the years **1940 thru October 1945** when the group was reassigned. Earl was one of 1000 pilots and 13,600 support personnel who came from all over the U.S. to train at the Macon County pilot center. Located in Tuskegee, Alabama, at the Institute of the same name, to get his wings Earl followed the same training

routine required of all pilots. He began his program with CPT (Civilian Pilot Training) at Tuskegee Institute. Training continued at Moton Field with PT -17 and PT -13 biplanes as well as a PT-19 monoplane. Next, he completed training at the **Tuskegee Airfield** with BT-13, AT-6 and P-40 aircraft or AT-10, B-25 bombers.

The first Tuskegee Airman was deployed in the spring of 1943 to North Africa. The 99th Fighter Squadron proved its mettle, and pilot Benjamin O. Davis distinguished himself as a black aviator of merit. Within the year the group's successes led to the deployment of the 332nd Fighter Group and action ensued in the European Theater, mostly Italy. Known by their distinctive Red Tails, the Tuskegee Airman flew P-51 Mustangs. In April 1944, Lt. Earl Lane graduated with his Tuskegee Airman Class. On March 24, 1945, Earl and two other pilots shot down three German jets or ME 262 (Messerschmitt) while escorting bombers on a run over Berlin. His victim was renowned 7-time kill German Ace, Alfred Ambbs. The legend of **The Black Bird Men** was cemented in WWII lore. All three airmen won distinguished citations for their valor in that action. In total, Earl Lane earned eight awards as a Tuskegee Airman.



Dorothy Chaffin Lane

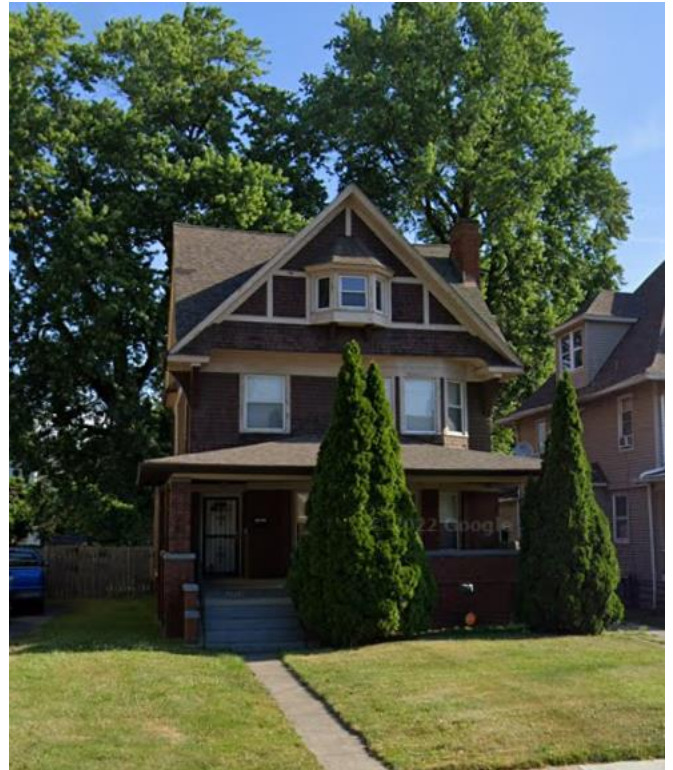
November 19, 1920 - May 1, 1998



The war forced Dorothy Chaffin (1920-1998) to cut her college studies short, and she returned to Cleveland to begin working for the U. S. Navy Finance Dept. There she met Lt. Earl Lane at the war's end, and they married in June 1948. The couple settled in Cleveland and had a daughter they named Leslie (1949-2006). In 1958, Earl Lane returned with his little family to Wickliffe to a house they had built on Robindale, next door to his parents Levi and Catherine Lane. Over his career, Earl owned a number of successful businesses in Cleveland. Among his other government roles, he served as the

Cuyahoga County Deputy Housing Coordinator.

Earl continued to pilot planes until the late 1970s, when he was forced to discontinue because of his health. His love of flying never diminished. Lt. Earl R. Lane was laid to rest at Cleveland's Highland Hills Cemetery.





Five Facts about the Tuskegee Airmen

- March 24, 1945, three Tuskegee Airman shot down Nazi Luftwaffe jet planes in a bomber encounter near Berlin's Daimler-Benz war factory. This was the largest number of kills scored by this famed group in a single day. Charles Brantly Jr., **Earl R. Lane** and Roscoe Brown were the pilots.
- **Thurgood Marshall** started his storied legal career as a lawyer representing 100 Black Officers in a segregation incident at an on base officer's club.
- **Eleanor Roosevelt** accepted a flight invitation in April 1941 with Charles Anderson. This 'hop' with a black aviator opened the doors for equal status in military operations in WWII.
- Tuskegee Airman Don 'Chappie' Jones was involved in the successful outcome in the 1970 Affair with Qaddafi
- Three Tuskegee Airman achieved the rank of General.

The Tuskegee Airmen's Motto: "All for One."

Sources: *Black Knights* by Lynn Holman & Thomas Riley, *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, *Hidden History of Lake County* by Jennifer Boresz Engelking, <https://www.pbs.org/articles/who-are-the-tuskegee-airmen/>, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/tuskegee-airmen-combating-discrimination>

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