



BLACK HILLS BANDIT



Tuskegee tough Tuskegee Airman's death does not end legacy, contributions continue to shape military

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A 19th century novelist once wrote that, "The legacy of heroes is the memory of a great name and the inheritance of a great example."

Lt. Col. Bennett Hardy provided both. Before his death May 10, he was one of only nine Tuskegee Airmen who earned all five sets of aviator wings (wings awarded as pilot, navigator, observer, bombardier and gunner) and touched at least one Ellsworth Airman - his grandson

Staff Sgt. Darren Hardy.

"The biggest thing I learned from my grand pop was it really doesn't matter where you are from or what your job is, if you are motivated you can do anything," said Sergeant Hardy, 28th Bomb Wing Staff wing commander support staff NCO in charge. "And to take care of the people that work for you and with you."

As a Tuskegee Airman, Colonel Hardy was one of about 1,500 black servicemembers who fought with valor during an era of discrimination and segregation.

"Because of what he (Colonel Hardy and other Tuskegee Airmen) accomplished I can stand tall and I have had choices in my career that would never have been even dreamed of by a minority, female

Air Force officer in my dad's early career, said Col. Toni Tengelsen, one of Colonel Hardy's eight children.

According to his children, there were a lot of prejudices they had to face, but the "love and pride he had for his family and his country and the belief he instilled in us that anything is possible if you put your mind to it," was another one of the legacies and helped set them up for success, but Colonel Hardy's accomplishments and successes impacted so many more than just his family, they went a long way in the struggle for equal opportunities for minorities in the military.

July 19, 1941 the Army Air Force began a program in Alabama to train black Americans

as military pilots. Although some Americans were skeptical about an all-black flying unit, the combat record of the Tuskegee Airmen speaks for itself.

The success of the Tuskegee Airmen, which started as an experiment, is reflected in its combat record which included more than 1,500 combat sorties, no bombers lost while being escorted and the collective earning of 150 distinguished flying crosses, 744 air medals, eight purple hearts and 14 bronze stars. Their accomplishments help illustrate the value of diversity in the military and helped pave the path for progressive change throughout the military.

Sergeant Hardy isn't the only one inspired by his grandfather's example. Military service is a family affair, as Colonel Hardy's daughter, Colonel Tengelsen; his son, Robert Hardy; his granddaughter-in-law, Staff Sgt. Raichael Hardy; his son, retired Army Maj. Bennett Gene Hardy; his son, retired Army 1st Sgt. Wesley Hardy; and his granddaughter, and Carrie Tengelsen, who will attend the Air Force Academy starting this fall; are also military members.