

## Airman continues grandfather's Tuskegee legacy at Balad

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The saying that Air Force history is easily found among its Airmen and their units became a reality for an Airman deployed here as she followed in her grandfather's footsteps and joined an elite group called Tuskegee Airmen.

Tech. Sgt. Rose Noches, a surgical service craftsman with the 332nd Expeditionary Medical Group at Balad Air Base, is a living legacy to the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II fame.

The legacy and history began in Tuskegee, Ala., 66 years ago when African-Americans proved themselves worthy in the sky and on the battlefield as an all African-American unit. They proved they could fly and maintain sophisticated combat aircraft during World War II.

With a rally cry of "The Legend Continues," the Tuskegee Airmen of the 332nd Fighter Group not only fought the Germans during World War II, but also they fought and overcame prejudices and prevalent racism within their own military. Tuskegee Airmen included pilots, navigators, bombardiers, maintenance, support staff, instructors and staff who kept the mission going.

Balad AB's 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing draws its heritage from these heroes of World War II, and now every Airman assigned here is referred to as a Tuskegee Airman.

"Coming here has really opened my eyes to my history," said Sergeant Noches, who deployed from Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. "It is great to see how much the Tuskegee Airmen's heritage is embraced here at Balad."

Sergeant Noches is the granddaughter of 1st Lt. Ramon F. Noches, a Tuskegee Airman who after his flight training in 1943 was assigned to the 477th Bomb Group at Godman Field, Fort Knox, Ky.

Lieutenant Noches flew numerous training missions in a B-25G aircraft until he was killed in an accident June 6, 1945, during night-flying training at Gunter Army Air Field in Montgomery, Ala.

Lieutenant Noches died, but left a legacy behind. His son, born four years before his death, and now a retired Air Force colonel, followed in his footsteps. Col. Ramon C. Noches was commissioned 18 years after his father's death. He retired in January 1990 after almost 27 years of serving his country. His legacy continues with his children, one of whom is Sergeant Noches.

"I never met my grandfather," she said. "The most that I've heard about him was not only being a pilot with the Tuskegee Airmen, but that he was a great mathematician."

Deploying to Balad AB has been an eye-opening experience for her about how important her family history is to the Air Force.

Not long after Sergeant Noches arrived here, she e-mailed her first sergeant, asking if she could display her



Tech. Sgt. Rose Noches sets up equipment for an exploratory laparotomy procedure at Balad Air Base, Iraq. Sergeant Noches is a granddaughter of 1st Lt. Ramon F. Noches, a Tuskegee Airman killed in a B-25G aircraft accident June 6, 1945, during night-flying training from Gunter Army Air Field at Montgomery, Ala. Sergeant Noches is a surgical service craftsman with the 332nd Expeditionary Medical Group and a living legacy to the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II fame. She is deployed from Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Gerard Anthony Sabido)

grandfather's picture somewhere on the base. She described the response she got as amazingly surprising. Not only did she get a positive response from her first sergeant, but also she has her own picture inserted in a big frame with her father's and grandfather's pictures. This frame is displayed in the 332nd AEW Headquarters building.

"It has been amazing, the way the Tuskegee spirit is preserved here," she said. "I feel extremely proud."

Sergeant Noches' father commanded many units during his service, and according to him, he was the first African-American officer assigned to most of his units back then, such as the advisor to the 12th Air Force commander, Tactical Air Command; and as the deputy director of administration of information management at Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Pentagon, Washington, D.C., among others.

As a legacy to her father and grandfather, Sergeant Noches, as a surgical service craftsman, is always available to assist surgeons during surgical procedures. Also, she is the senior "float" in the operating room. She is called upon anytime to assist the supply custodian in maintaining supply levels and to train volunteers on how to retrieve blood.

Serving here on her second deployment, the sergeant is all about saving the lives of those who serve. During her first deployment four years ago to Iraq at Ali AB, formerly known as Tallil AB, she helped complete about 50 surgical procedures in 93 days. Here they have the capability to do 50 procedures in two days.

"It certainly feels like everything has come full circle, being a part of the 332nd AEW as my grandfather was," she said. "The day-to-day experience has been a challenge; just about all the knowledge and skills I've acquired since I was an Airman is being put to use. The payoff is saving Americans, Soldiers, Airmen and Marines or Iraqi men, women and children. The work is rewarding."

Sergeant Noches said she is proud to be a Balad AB Tuskegee Airman and a member of the 332nd EMDG, and she also plans to leave a legacy for her two daughters and their future generations. She believes in the 332nd AEW battle cry: "Combat airpower for America, right here, right now; the legend continues."

"At the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing, we talk about how the legend continues. In the 332nd Expeditionary Medical Group, we have been blessed with one of our own who is the living legacy," said Col. Brian Masterson, the 332nd EMDG commander. "Sergeant Noches is the realization of the dreams of brave Americans long past. Sixty-six years ago, these men dared to dream, of a world without oppression and terror, but more importantly a world where those willing to take a stand for human liberty were not judged by the color of their skin."

"When Rose Noches approached me at the beginning of AEF rotation 7 and 8 about her family history, little did any of us realize the time odyssey that she and her family would travel," the colonel said. "The story of three generations of the Noches family is one of honor and one that is very humbling when we realize how far we have come with the dream."