

A Special Young Eagles Event

Orlando, Fla. - August 18, 2005
By Amy Laboda

On a steamy, hot morning at Orlando Executive Airport's Shelt Air FBO hangar, more than 120 youths and their adult supervisors, parents and friends turned out for a rare (for Florida) summer Young Eagles Day. EAA Chapter 74 and the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., jointly sponsored the special rally, which served as a special kick-off to this week's 34th Annual Tuskegee Airmen's National Convention.

Before the flight rally, visitors were treated to a deluxe EAA Chapter pancake breakfast, ushered in by a Junior ROTC Color Guard presentation, followed by a Tuskegee Airmen primer from one of their own, Airman Hiram Mann. EAA Chapter 74 President Glenn Ball also formally welcomed attendees.

Fantasy of Flight Museum owner and founder Kermit Weeks flew in with his rare P-51C "Red Tail," an original Tuskegee Airmen fighter. With the Orlando tower's cooperation, Weeks performed a series of flybys for the appreciative crowd.

EAA Chapter 74 Young Eagles Coordinator Eric Von said that the day went off mostly without a hitch. "We had 17 pilots and 15 aircraft originally scheduled to fly," he said. "One person was a no-show, and one (plane) was a no-op before we commenced the first round of dispatches."

When one pilot arrived late, one of the Tuskegee Airmen who regularly flies Young Eagles in other locations stepped up to volunteer his flight skills. It only took two and a half hours to fly all 120 youths.

The Tuskegee Airmen were some 450 African American pilots who trained at Tuskegee Army Air Field, Alabama, during World War II. They served overseas in the 99th Pursuit Squadron (later the 99th Fighter Squadron) or the 332nd Fighter Group. In April 1944, the 332nd transferred to the Adriatic Sea side at Ramitelli Air Strip, near Foggia, Italy, and began conducting long-range heavy bomber escort missions for the 15th Strategic Air Force.

In July 1944, the 99th Fighter Squadron was transferred to Ramitelli and the Group became the only four-squadron fighter group performing bomber escort missions in the 15th Air Force. There they established the incredible and



EAA Chapter 74 served a traditional EAA pancake breakfast to youths to kick off the Young Eagles Day in Orlando.



Tuskegee Airman Hiram Mann in front of the P-51C, painted in the familiar Red Tail scheme of Lt. Col. Lee "Buddy" Archer, who was the only Tuskegee pilot to shoot down five enemy aircraft in World War II.

unprecedented record of flying all of their bomber escort missions (200 over most of central and southern Europe) without the loss of a single bomber to enemy aircraft. They also happened to be the only all-African American fighter squadrons in World War II.

Each of these exceptionally dedicated airmen accepted the challenge of becoming fighter pilots despite having to put up with extreme prejudice at home and overseas. They fought two wars-one against a military force overseas and the other against racism at home and abroad. In 1948, the President Truman ended segregation in the military and kicked-off the Civil Rights Movement.

