



BIOGRAPHY

A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

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Robert Leander Martin



Mr. Robert Leander Martin (1919-2018) was born and raised in Dubuque, Iowa. The 6th child of Dr. Henry Ambrose Martin and Mattie Ducano, Robert was curious and competitive. Assisting with his Boy Scout Troop at a local air show, and receiving a ride in an airplane, Robert's love of flying was cemented.

Robert graduated from Dubuque Senior High School and went on to graduate from Iowa State College (University) in 1942. During his Iowa State years, Robert earned both a Pilot's License and a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering. Although accepted in the Tuskegee Pilot program with one of the highest scores of the day, Robert was drafted by the Army and served a brief stint at Camp Dodge. Following receipt of orders to report to Tuskegee, Robert entered the Army Air Corps program May 4, 1943. He was assigned and trained at Selfridge Field, MI and Walterboro Army Airfield, SC. He graduated as a 2d Lieutenant and his wings were pinned on January 7, 1944.

Nicknamed "Fox", 2 LT Martin was assigned to the 100th Fighter Squadron. He passed through Algiers on the way to Ramitelli Air Base in Italy, where he arrived on June 28, 1944. He flew escort and strafing missions in the P-47 and P-51 between June 1944 and March 1945. On January 4, 1945, 2 LT Martin was promoted to 1st Lieutenant. On March 3, 1945, although his plane was out for service, 1 LT Martin volunteered for a strafing mission. During this 64th mission, while strafing airplanes on the Zagreb Aerodrome, his plane was hit by ground fire. Forced to bail out of his burning plane, 1 LT Martin's first attempt to eject resulted in his parachute strap getting caught so he had to roll the plane upright and gain altitude. On his second attempt, he successfully rolled out of the plane. On the ground, 1 LT Martin was able to run from the area. While surveilling a farmhouse, he was approached by a young boy. After the stare down and assessments, the young boy called him an "American."

Not wanting to cause a scene that might draw the enemy to the area, 1 LT Martin followed the boy to a farmhouse where he was greeted by Marshall Tito's partisans, fed and given warm coffee. After a week, he moved to an allied mission in the town of Topusko, Yugoslavia. There, he was able to bathe in the hot springs, was well fed and paraded through the town as an American hero. Fearful of spies, 1 LT Martin quietly went about learning as much as he could about the location, its security and whether he would be able to return to his base. Back with the 100th Fighter Squadron on April 10, 1945, 1 LT Martin celebrated VE day on May 2, 1945, in Cattolica, Italy. He was honorably discharged April 30, and returned to the United States on May 20, 1945.



After the war, Robert moved to Chicago, married Dr. Odette Ewell and raised four children – Robert Jr., Gabrielle, Noelle and Dominique. He held a number of positions with the city of Chicago and earned a certificate in computer programming, eventually rising to the senior level of Electrical Design Engineer for Chicago. He continued his service as an officer in his neighborhood association and supported the local Boy Scout Troop. As an early member of the Chicago DODO Chapter, his passion for flying continued. He worked with the DODO Chapter's Scholarship Committee, chaired the golf fundraiser, worked with the Young Eagles program and tutored students in STEM subjects. Robert was an avid member of the Chicago DODO's Speaker's Bureau. He returned to his Iowa hometown and participated in the Dubuque Alternative High School "Tuskegee Airmen Experience" project. Robert's hobbies included skiing, woodworking, travel, and golf—the latter of which he played at least once in each of the 50 states.

Robert received a number of civilian awards, including entry into the United States Congressional Record on June 10, 2013, and the George Washington Carver Medal from Simpson College. Posthumously, and through an act of Congress, the post office in Olympia Fields, IL is now the "Captain Robert L. Martin Post Office." Through acts of the City Council and Airport Commission of Dubuque, Iowa, the airport terminal now is named the Captain Robert L. Martin Terminal. Through proclamations of both the Iowan City, and the County of Dubuque, Iowa, the birthday of Captain Martin is recognized each year during Black History Month.

With conditions perfect for flying, Robert joined the Lonely Eagles on July 26, 2018.

