Activated December 1942 as U.S. Army Air Forces advanced training school for World War II twin engine pilots; graduated over 4,000 by February 1945. Construction of 413 structures and four 5,500-foot runways supervised by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; named for Indiana pilot Captain Richard S. Freeman (1907-1941). Deactivated in 1948.

Report

The file for the Freeman Field marker contains adequate primary sources supporting the text of the marker. However, the marker omits mention of the 1945 mutiny of Tuskegee Airmen, a pivotal event in the desegregation of the United States Air Force, which took place at Freeman Field. This review attempts to provide sources of information on the mutiny and the airmen.

With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the United States Armed Forces began recruiting greater numbers of African Americans for segregated “Negro units.” By 1941, the Air Corps formed an African American fighter squadron of 47 officers and 429 enlistees to train at Tuskegee Field in Alabama. The 332nd Fighter Group and the 477th Bombardment Group became known as the Tuskegee Airmen. Starting in 1943, some airmen saw action in North Africa and the Mediterranean, while the 477th Bombardment Group “fought a more insidious war at home.”

The Air Force set up a training school for African American navigators and bombardiers of the 477th, first at Selfridge Field in Michigan and then Godman Field in Kentucky. In 1943, racial tension over black officers being denied entrance to the officers’ club resulted in the 477th being relocated to Freeman Field in Seymour, Indiana where there were two clubs. At Freeman Field, one club was designated for “trainees” and another for “supervisors.” However, the divide became racial as all black airmen were designated “trainees,” even the “captains, lieutenants and flight officers ---several of them overseas veterans and proud wearers of the Distinguished Flying Cross and Purple Heart.” This racial separation was in violation of Army Regulation 210-10 which outlawed segregated clubs in 1940. The men challenged this unequal treatment by forcibly entering the white officers’ club on April 5, 1945. Approximately sixty officers were arrested, with more arrests April 7 and 8. Intense pressure from civil rights advocates, including the NAACP, and the media and public resulted in “momentous changes.”

The controversy resulted in the War Department revising regulations on segregation and ended segregated officers’ clubs. Since then, the mutiny at Freeman Field has been viewed as a “bellwether for integration of the U.S. military.” In 1995, the Air Force set aside Terry’s conviction.

Links


“Freeman Field,” The Indiana Historian (June 1998) [http://www.in.gov/history/2501.htm](http://www.in.gov/history/2501.htm)
Jackson County
Marker Text Review Report
01/27/2012


Indianapolis Recorder Articles:


7 Allison, 6-8.