

(For general circulation)

‘Britain’s Tuskegees’: the RAF’s Caribbean World War Two heroes

A planned 90-minute documentary to be presented by [Donna Bernard](#)



Flight Sergeant James Hyde, Trinidad, 132 Squadron

A British TV production company is interested in meeting – wherever they may be in the world – young people who are the descendants of the RAF’s unsung Caribbean aircrew from World War Two, of whom there were some 450 who served as pilots, navigators, gunners and wireless operators, of all races but many of them Black. This is in addition to many thousands of skilled groundcrew from the Caribbean and West Africa.

The Royal Air Force, unlike the United States Air Force, was not segregated during the war, and these men were distributed around many different squadrons; they had no distinct military identity, unlike the American ‘Red Tails’, so their story – their ‘fight to be allowed to fight’ – is largely unknown.

The plan is to engage on-screen with the descendants of around four veterans whose stories would be retrievable to some degree from service records and contemporary accounts, weaving in the broader history and allowing them, in effect, to speak for all the flyers.

The history of Britain’s Tuskegee Airmen, as author Mark Johnson calls them – himself the great-nephew of a veteran, Flight Lieutenant John Blair, DFC of Jamaica – has been captured in some books and memoirs, but it has never been told on mainstream television. Johnson is one of the executive producers for the project, and his book, [Caribbean Volunteers at War](#) with its [roll of honour](#), and the RAF Museum’s 2018 exhibition, [Pilots of the Caribbean](#), with which he collaborated

extensively, are important sources. This history also includes [an estimated 80 Caribbean women](#) (see below) who served in the WAAF, and others who filled many supporting roles and must not be forgotten.



Jamaican women WAAF volunteers leaving the new Colonial Centre in Russell Square in 1943: left to right, Noelle Thompson, Sally Lopez, A. Labadie and Sonia Thompson.

The Royal Air Force reserved certain roles for the best of the best: fighter pilots and Bomber Command navigators – today it remains of profound importance that so many Black aircrew volunteers served in these capacities. It's also worth noting that a large proportion of them returned home to become prominent politicians, judges, doctors and educators. It is time to fully recognize these heroes of the skies and leaders of their post-war societies.

Please pass this short brief on to any families who might be interested and ask them to get in touch: donna.bernard@btinternet.com.