

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Joseph Gomer

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Gomer, Joseph, 1920-2013
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Gomer,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 12, 2002
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2002
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:48:08).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Tuskegee airman Joseph Gomer (1920 - 2013 ) was a fighter pilot in 99th Pursuit Squadron of the Tuskegee Airmen. Gomer was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 12, 2002, in Duluth, Minnesota. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2002_140
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Retired United States Air Force Major Joseph Philip Gomer served as a fighter pilot with World War II's famed Tuskegee Airmen. Gomer was born on June 20, 1920 in Iowa Falls, Iowa. From the time he was a small boy, he dreamed of flying airplanes.

Gomer and his brother attended school in a town where there were never more than three black families. The only black in his class, Gomer graduated from Iowa Falls High School with honors in 1938. He completed two years of study at Ellsworth College in Iowa Falls, where he took a class in flight instruction. When he enlisted in the Army in 1942, Gomer signed up for pilots' training. His previous flying experience at Ellsworth qualified him to be sent to Tuskegee Army Air Field in Alabama to participate in President Roosevelt's new program to train black pilots. Gomer received his wings in May of 1943. He was assigned as a Second Lieutenant to the segregated 332 Fighter Group and sent to Ramitrella, Italy, to join the 301st Fighter Squadron.

The 332 Fighter Group served as escorts for the 15th Air Force, running bombing missions in Germany. Engaging German fighters and attacking enemy positions, they fulfilled their mission to perfection-never losing a bomber to the enemy. The white bomber pilots called their guardians the "Red Tailed Angels" after the distinctive markings on their planes. Many of these white bomber pilots did not know that their guardians were black. In Italy, the Red Tails flew over 1,500 sorties, downing 111 enemy aircraft and sinking one German destroyer as 66 black pilots were killed in action. Joseph Gomer shared a tent with three other airmen, but within eight months all of them were killed, leaving him the sole survivor. He crash-landed a P-39, lost his canopy, and was bullet ridden in a P-47, but fought with skill and valor in over 68 sorties with the enemy. Fighting racism as well as the Germans, Gomer remained with the Air Force after the war and was still in service on July 26, 1948, when President Truman signed Executive Order 9981 integrating the United States Armed Forces.

After retiring from the Air Force, Gomer worked for the United States Forestry Service where he earned meritorious recognition for his work in providing equal opportunities for minorities. He currently lives with his

wife, Elizabeth, in Duluth, Minnesota. He volunteers in the schools and at church and keeps the name of the Tuskegee Airmen alive.

Gomer passed away on October 10, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Joseph Gomer was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 12, 2002, in Duluth, Minnesota, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Tuskegee airman Joseph Gomer (1920 - 2013 ) was a fighter pilot in 99th Pursuit Squadron of the Tuskegee Airmen.

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## Restrictions

### Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

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## Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Gomer, Joseph, 1920-2013

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Gomer, Joseph, 1920-2013--Interviews

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United States. Army Air Forces. Fighter Group, 332nd--Interviews.

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African American air pilots--Interviews.

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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United States. Army Air Forces. Fighter Group, 332nd.

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## Occupations:

Tuskegee Airman

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MilitaryMakers

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## Administrative Information

### Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

### Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Gomer, August 12, 2002. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Gomer, Section A2002\_140\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Joseph Gomer was born on June 20, 1920 to Eula and Philip Gomer in Iowa Falls, Iowa. Gomer knows little of his family history. His mother, who was of African American and Native American heritage, was a homemaker. His father, who was of African American and German ancestry worked as a custodian. His aunt, Nina Gomer was W.E.B. Du Bois' first wife. By the age of twelve, Gomer was already helping his father with custodial work. Gomer attended Iowa Falls High School, an all-white high school. As a youth in the small town of Iowa Falls, Gomer participated in school and social activities without experiencing racial discrimination. Gomer graduated from Iowa Falls High School in 1938. His academic achievement earned him a college scholarship to attend Ellsworth Junior College in 1940 where he was perceived as a threat because of his race. After graduating in 1940, Gomer's efforts to enlist in the war effort were met by resistance until he was called to join the Tuskegee Airmen in 1942.

United States--Armed Forces--African Americans.

Iowa--Race relations.

Iowa Falls (Iowa). Ellsworth Community College.

Education, Secondary.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Iowa--Iowa Falls.

African Americans--Military service.

Tuskegee Army Air Field (Ala.)--History.

African American families--Iowa--social life and customs.

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Gomer, Section A2002\_140\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Joseph Gomer describes his training as a fighter pilot in Tuskegee, Alabama. He had excellent instructors like Daniel "Chappie" James, Jr., who later became the first African American four-star general in the military. As a pilot, Gomer was able to fly all the single-engine fighters including the P-40, which he describes in detail. Despite the U.S. Army's reluctance to place black pilots in combat, Gomer was deployed to Italy as part of the 332nd Fighter Group in 1942 under the command of Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. During World War II, the 332nd flew strafing missions and convoy patrols. The group's reputation for never losing any fighters to enemy bombers earned them the name "Red Tail Angels". Gomer shares a few memorable strafing missions including an episode that left him alone in enemy territory with neither a canopy nor goggles. In all, Gomer flew sixty-eight missions before he asked to be transferred due to the psychological toll of warfare.

African American air pilots.

World War, 1939-1945--African Americans--Italy.

United States. Army Air Forces. Fighter Group, 332nd.

World War, 1939-1945--Air operations--American--Italy.

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, African American.

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Gomer, Section A2002\_140\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Joseph Gomer fought in World War II from 1942 to 1944. During the war, Gomer corresponded with his family through V-mail, but did not share information about his missions, which included a near death experience. The casualties of pilots in the 332nd Fighter Group took a psychological toll on

Gomer. He asked to be transferred out of combat in 1944. Gomer faced racial discrimination upon his return to the United States during which he worked as a training instructor in Tuskegee, Alabama and at Chanute Air Force Base. After President Harry S. Truman passed Executive Order 9981 in 1948, Gomer joined many other Tuskegee Airmen in integrating the U.S. Armed Forces. The legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen has been acknowledged by HistoryMakers Guion Bluford and Colin Powell. Gomer integrated Langley Air Force Base with his wife. Gomer fought in the Korean War from 1942 to 1954. After he was discharged in 1964, Gomer moved to Duluth, Minnesota and worked for the U.S. Forest Service. His work with women and minorities was nationally recognized with a superior service award from the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1985.

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, African American.

United States. Army. Women's Army Corps.

Korean War, 1950-1953--Participation, African American.

Korean War, 1950-1953--Air operations--American.

Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.

Tuskegee Army Air Field (Ala.)--History.

Chanute Air Force Base (Ill.)--History.

Hampton Institute.

Hampton (Va.).

United States. Forest Service--History--20th century.

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Gomer, Section A2002\_140\_001\_004, TRT: 0:19:03 ?

Joseph Gomer reflects upon his legacy and how he would like to be remembered. He narrates his photographs.