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960167. (Feature) First black aviator
by Tech. Sgt. David P. Masko
Air Force News Service Features

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, Ala. -- Long before there was the 99th Pursuit Squadron and the 332nd Fighter Group -- units known today as the Tuskegee Airman -- there was Eugene Jacques Bullard. In an era when the dignity of African-Americans was not always recognized, Bullard exploded on the world stage and became, among other things, the first black aviator. He was a pilot, and an enlisted man.

Bullard's life is one of personal achievement set against formidable odds. For this celebration of Black History Month, Bullard's story is a good example of the kind of individual whose legacy captures the shape and boundaries of extraordinary achievements of African-Americans in aviation and military service.

A display at the Enlisted Heritage Hall at Gunter Annex, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., features a painting of Bullard when he was a pilot and a member of the French 170th infantry. His original 1917 pilot's certificate is also part of the display.

For many who read about Bullard, there's a feeling that a movie should be made about his colorful life. The display tells this story:

He was born in 1894 in Columbus, Ga. He left home at the age of 8 in search of France where, as his father had told him, "Man was judged by his merit, not the color of his skin."

After two years of wandering, Bullard stowed away on a steamer sailing from New York to Scotland. For 10 years he embarked upon various livelihoods, eventually becoming known as a successful welterweight prize fighter.

In October 1914, as World War I began, he joined the French Foreign Legion, engaging in hand-to-hand combat in some of the most hotly contested battles of the war. He was wounded twice.

In October 1916, he was selected for pilot training and on May 7, 1917, he became the world's first black fighter pilot. As an enlisted pilot, Bullard scored two "kills," but only one of them was confirmed.

His second kill, early in November 1917, however, was definite.

A history of Bullard's life states that he singled out an enemy plane and attacked. His intended victim went into a turn, flying nose up and then turning backward, to come in from behind. Bullard dodged into a cloud bank. When he emerged, his foe was above him to the right, but Bullard was able to pull behind him and bring him down.

In post-war France, Bullard, a national hero, became a successful night club owner and popular musician in Paris. He married a countess and became the father of two daughters.

When World War II erupted, he was a member of the underground and an associate of the famed French spy and resistance leader Cleopatra Terrier. He was severely wounded in July 1940 fighting Nazis in Europe and was evacuated to New

York City.

Although America never knew of his heroic exploits, France never forgot. In 1954, Bullard was recalled to Paris by the French government to rekindle -- along with two white Frenchmen -- the everlasting flame at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier under the Arc of Triumph in Paris.

A year later, President Charles De Gaulle internationally embraced him as a French hero.

Bullard died on Oct. 12, 1961. He was buried with honors by French war officers in Flushing, N.Y.

Although there are painful accounts a discrimination in Bullard's life when he lived in the United Stateul he never allowed it to affect who he was as a man.

Perhaps most satisfying to Bullard was to live and see President Truman's integration of the military in 1949, and other legislation in 1960 to help solve the problems of African-Americans in the military.

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Black man fights for dream

Vivian M. White
Museum Specialist

Editor's Note: The following is the first in a series of four articles highlighting Black History Month.

Eugene Bullard set out to fulfill a dream at a very early age. He would not let his dream elude him. He was determined. Bullard's dream was to go to France where his father had repeatedly told him, "All men are treated as equals."

Eugene "Gene" Bullard was born in Columbus, Ga., Oct. 8, 1894, the seventh of 10 children and the grandson of a slave. His mother died when he was 5 years old, leaving his father to work and care for the family.

Gene ran away from home at the age of 8 after nightriders sought to lynch his father because of a fight with a co-worker.

After wandering around the South for a couple of years doing whatever he could find to do, Bullard finally reached Norfolk, Va., where he boarded a ship as a stowaway. He was discovered and put ashore in Aberdeen, Scotland.

He was now in Europe but still hundreds of miles from France. What would a 12-year-old, practically broke, do in a strange country?

He received stares. The Scots probably had never seen a black man before, but they were kind to him. Again he worked at odd jobs from city to city, all the time getting closer and closer to his destination — France.

One of his odd jobs was somewhat unusual. In an amusement park similar to Coney Island, he found employment as a target for penny-a-ball tossers.

He would stick his head through a hole in a large sheet of canvas and try to duck the tosses. Luckily, the balls were not very hard and Gene became extremely agile in dodging most of them.

By working two days on the weekends he earned 20 shillings, which was enough for his keep.

In his spare time he began to hang around a gymnasium in Liverpool doing chores for the owner and the boxers there. It wasn't long before Gene was in training to become a boxer himself.

He was a likable guy and the other boxers took an interest in him and taught him all they knew about boxing. After countless months of boxing and body building, he moved up to the lightweight class.

At a match in the Liverpool Stadium, a professional boxer saw Bullard fight and was so impressed that he asked Bullard to accompany him to London as his protégé. Gene didn't have to be asked twice.

After working a number of months in the London boxing clubs, he was informed it had been arranged for him to box in the Elysees Montmartre. He was going to France at last.

France appeared to be all he hoped it would be. When he had to return to London, he was no longer content there. Because he couldn't get another boxing match in

France, he joined a slapstick comedy troupe and returned to France.

It wasn't long after his return that World War I erupted. Shocked by the deaths of so many of his new-found friends in the early days of the war, Gene decided to volunteer for the French Foreign Legion and fight alongside them.

He fought in some of history's bloodiest battles — Arras, Champagne, and Verdun. He was wounded twice. He received a leg wound which hospitalized him, and for a time the doctors doubted if he would ever be able to walk without a limp.

But, with Gene's strong determination and constant exercising, it wasn't long before he was able to discard the cane he'd been using.

Gene had a lot of time to think while in the hospital. He knew there was no question of his returning to the front and he didn't want to return to civilian life.

It was then Bullard decided he would like to become a pilot.

Some of his friends thought he was crazy. Whoever had heard of a black pilot? Through the help of influential friends, Gene was transferred to the French Air Service and began his training.

It wasn't easy, but learning to fly was an exhilarating experience. Bullard could hardly believe it was possible he had reached that plateau.

In the clouds he felt free, truly free — free of the bonds of the earth, and free of a life filled with prejudices. But these prejudices were not to be so easily escaped.

Bullard received his pilot's license on May 5, 1917, and after several months he still had not been sent to the front.

As the week passed, he saw pilots leave for combat service who had come after he had. He suspected there were forces working against him.

After threatening to write a letter to one of the higher-ranking officials who had been instrumental in getting him into aviation, he finally received orders for the front.

He learned with great pride he had been assigned to Escadrille Spad 99, alongside other top notch fighter pilots in four other squadrons flying SPAD airplanes.

Bullard quickly found out that fighting in the air was not like fighting in the trenches. Yet day after day he eagerly awaited the opportunity to go out and engage the enemy. He was credited with shooting down one enemy airplane.

After the United States entered the war, Bullard learned from his friends that Uncle Sam would accept all American pilots serving France and would also advance them in rank. His imagination ran wild as he pictured himself in an American aviator's uniform with

captain's bars on his shoulders, his silver pilots' wings and a chest full of decorations.

His dream was short lived as he waited while one after another of his fellow American flyers were transferred to the United States Air Service while no word at all came for him. He continued to fly for France until Nov. 11, 1917, when his flying career abruptly came to an end.

To this day, researchers have been unable to uncover the exact

Bullard knew the officer was violating military regulations. When the officer questioned him, he remained at attention without responding. This infuriated the officer.

Finally, Bullard told him he could not consider him as an officer until he learned to return a salute. The officer jumped up and shouted angrily at Bullard that he was unworthy of the decorations he was wearing.

The enemy appeared to be the same one which had haunted him at home and still followed...

reason for his removal from the rolls of active battle flyers of France.

Bullard felt his removal came about because of an incident which took place one evening in a Paris nightclub. Being the only black pilot in the club, he was somewhat of a curiosity. An officer beckoned for Bullard. Bullard walked over, came to attention and gave a big salute. In the French Army all officers were to acknowledge and return all salutes.

The next thing Bullard knew, he was being summoned to the group doctor and was told he had to be evacuated.

The enemy appeared to be the same old one which had haunted him at home and still followed in his footsteps overseas, despite all of his unselfish contributions.

Bullard's career did not end there. Between wars, he was a bartender, restaurant owner and a member of the French underground. When the Germans invaded France, they seized all the property he had successfully built up. He was forced to flee the country and eventually returned to America.

Back in the United States, the aging Bullard found life much less exciting. His back had been injured while in France and he was unable to work at heavy labor. He was proud and would not take a handout.

During the next few years, he earned money at various jobs — salesman, guard at an Army base in Brooklyn, touring Europe as a factotum and interpreter for jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong, and working as an elevator operator in Rockefeller Center.

At the latter job he met Dave Garroway and appeared with him on the old NBC "Today Show" in New York City in a 15-minute interview.

Bullard died Oct. 12, 1961, in New York City. He was 67. For his services to France, he received 15 French medals, all of which are on display at the Air Force Museum. Among them are the Croix de Guerre, Croix de la France, the Legion of Honor and the Medaille de la Somme.

During a speech when he was presented with the Legion of Honor he said, "The United States is my mother and I love my mother; but as far as France is concerned, she is my mistress and you love your mistress more than you love your mother — but in a different way."

Bullard's medals can be seen at the Air Force Museum any weekday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; weekends, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The museum gift shop also has a book for sale on the life of Gene Bullard entitled, "The Black Swallow of Death."



Eugene Bullard

Overdue

First Black fighter pilot receives recognition

by SrA. Randy Roughton
Dispatch staff writer

The historical information in this story was obtained from Corporal Bullard's biography and a magazine article, "The Incredible Life of Monsieur Bullard," by Mary H. Smith that appeared in Ebony magazine December 1987.

After 70 years, a boxer and warrior's fight will finally be won when the 3800th Air Base Wing memorializes Air Force Senior NCO Academy's dormitory building 1014 to Cpl. Eugene Jacques Bullard at 8:30 a.m. Wednesday.

"This memorialization will finally commemorate an American hero whose recognition is long overdue," said CMSgt. Oscar M. West, who is the memorialization ceremony chairman.

Corporal Bullard was a native American who became the world's first Black fighter pilot when he flew for France during World War I.

The Columbus, Ga., born Bullard wandered throughout the Southeastern United States hunting for France, unable to find his way because he was illiterate. Two years later, 10-year-old Bullard stowed away on a steamship out of Newport News, Va., and arrived one step closer to his destination when the steamer pulled into Scotland.

Bullard spent the next several years earning a living as an errand boy before meeting a famous boxer in England. "The Dixie Kid" groomed Bullard to put on boxing gloves himself and he went on to win welterweight fights in Liverpool, North Africa and, later, in France.

When WWI began, Bullard enlisted in the French Foreign Legion and was assigned to the 170th French Infantry, which was a regiment comprised of Americans. Bullard participated in some of the most

heated battles of 1915-1916 and was awarded the Croix de Guerre for his heroism when he was wounded in one battle. Afterwards, Bullard completed pilot training and reported for duty in the French Air Service, where he downed two German aircraft, although the kills were never confirmed.

Bullard's flying career ended in 1918 when American pilots flying for France and Great Britain were reorganized under the Lafayette Escadrille and commissioned into the U.S. Army. He was denied a

commission because it was decided that it wouldn't be proper for white soldiers to be subordinate to a black officer.

Between the wars, Bullard operated one of the most famous nightclubs in Paris. But when WWII broke out, he once again answered his adopted country's call to arms, joining the French underground and resistance movement in 1939 and working at times with Cleopatra Terrier, a famous French spy. When Hitler's forces invaded France, Bullard was wounded at Orleans, but French citizens smuggled him to Spain to avoid capture by the Nazis. He was medivacced to the United States just as France fell to Nazi Germany.

Remembering Bullard, the French government presented him with the honor of re-lighting the flame at France's Eternal Flame of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris in 1954. Five years later, he became a Knight of the Legion of Honor in New York City. When he died in 1961, Bullard was buried with full colors by the Federation of French war officers with the country's tri-color draping his coffin at Flushing Cemetery in New York.

However, it's only recently that the Bullard story has come to light. In the forefront of these efforts has been the Air Force Enlisted Heritage Hall, which spearheaded the memorialization ceremony. "Corporal Bullard is an aviation trailblazer whose contributions have never entered the annals of airpower history," said CMSgt. Wayne Fisk, heritage hall director. "Here we have a courageous warrior in whose footsteps all other Black aviators follow. No Black has gone before him, but many have followed."



Cpl. Eugene Bullard

World's first black aviator remembered as trailblazer

By Liza Benham
Staff Writer

Although Eugene Jacques Bullard left Columbus "very emotional" in the spring of 1906, he harbored no lifelong ill will against the city that introduced him to racism, according to family members and a researcher into the life of the world's first black aviator.

"My grandfather was interested in my being a gentleman. He was self-taught himself and wanted to be sure I got an education," Bullard's grandson, Richard Reid, said in Columbus Thursday.

Bullard's daughter, Jacqueline O'Jarro, said her father taught her and her sister to "respect ourselves, respect others and that if others did not respect us, to demand that they did."

Bullard's daughter, his grandson and a great-grandson, Kenneth Reid, attended a luncheon sponsored by Columbus College archivist Craig Lloyd, who has done extensive research on Bullard's life. Wednesday, the relatives were at Gunter Air Force Base in Montgomery, Ala., where a dormitory for students attending the Non-commissioned Officers' Academy was dedicated in his name. Gunter AFB also has opened Heritage Hall, chronicling the history of enlisted men and aviation.

The dedication could indicate renewed interest in the man who rose from a birth in 1894 as a laborer's child in the Rose Hill community to become a well-known name in the cafe society of Paris in the 1920s and '30s. His nightclub, Le Grand Duc, was frequented by such notables as F. Scott Fitzgerald, the Prince of Wales and Langston Hughes — the last even



Lt. Col. Francois Migeon and Columbus College President Frank Brown meet Jacqueline O'Jarro, Eugene Bullard's daughter, working there as a dishwasher for a while, Lloyd said.

A written account of life at Le Grand Duc includes the phrase "Bricktop, Gene Bullard, Josephine Baker," which indicates that Bullard was even better known among the jet set of the Roaring Twenties than has been acknowledged, said Lloyd. Bricktop, the hostess-owner of a popular Paris bistro bearing her name, writes that

But it was before he began rubbing elbows with the elite that Bullard secured his place in history. After he left Columbus in 1906, he wandered over the South before going to New York City, where he hopped a ship for Europe. When World War I began, he signed on with the French Army, and from there became a pilot, flying

combat missions with the Lafayette Escadrille.

When World War II loomed, bringing with it the Nazi psychosis, he decided he and his two daughters would be better off in the U.S. than France. He died nearly penniless in 1961.

Lloyd told the luncheon audience he became interested in Bullard's life after reading about the aviator in "The Road From Bondage," a series on local black history published by The Columbus Ledger in 1981. He obtained a National Endowment for the Humanities grant for his research, including a trip to Paris.

Bullard's relatives were to tour Columbus during their stay here, including the area at 26th Street and Talbotton Road listed as his family's home in the 1900 census.

Bullard's father, William, was a dockworker for the W.C. Bradley Co. who incurred the wrath of an overseer reportedly jealous of his strength and stoicism. One day, William Bullard exploded under the overseer's relentless taunting and flung him down a shaft. W.C. Bradley reportedly helped Bullard hide from the inevitable lynch mob.

"(Eugene) Bullard never shook the terror of it," Lloyd said. Bullard wrote in his memoirs of the sense of freedom and manhood he gained in Paris, home then to many blacks who emigrated from the U.S.

James W. Ryan, in his biography of Bullard, "The Black Swallow of Death," said people who knew him in Paris described him as "hot-tempered," most easily angered over

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AVIATOR

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racial matters. He never cared how many men he had to take on, although he was otherwise extraordinarily kind and generous, Ryan writes.

The new Columbus Museum will include a mention of Bullard, said curator Fred Fussell. And a sculptor, Eddie Dixon, is at work on a life-size bronze statue of Bullard to be placed in the Smithsonian Institution, said Master Sgt. Paul Brown of Gunter AFB.

Brown said Bullard's relative obscurity is not unusual for a trailblazer. "He was the one who blazed the trail, others came along and widened it and were more remembered," Brown said. He also pointed out that Bullard flew for France, and the United States understandably has been preoccupied with what its own troops did during the war, he said.

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Bullard, Eugene

SERVICE RECORD

EUGENE BULLARD, Columbus, Georgia.

PREVIOUS SERVICE: 1915-16, Foreign Legion (Infantry).

SERVICE IN FRENCH AVIATION:

Date of enlistment: November 15, 1916.

Aviation Schools: November 30, 1916, to August 20, 1917, Cazeaux, Tours, Avord, G.D.E.

At the Front: Escadrille Spad 93, August 27 to September 13, 1917.

Escadrille Spad 85, September 13 to November 11, 1917.

Final Rank: Caporal.

Returned to duty with 170th (French) Infantry Regiment, January 11, 1918.

DECORATIONS:

Croix de Guerre, with Star.



EUGENE BULLARD

THE writer will never forget one occasion when he was waiting at 23 avenue du Bois to see Dr. Gros. Suddenly the door opened to admit a vision of military splendor such as one does not see twice in a lifetime. It was Eugene Bullard.

His jolly black face shone with a grin of greeting and justifiable vanity. He wore a pair of tan aviator's boots which gleamed with a mirror-like luster, and above them his breeches smote the eye with a dash of vivid scarlet. His black tunic, excellently cut and set off by a fine figure, was decorated with a pilot's badge, a *Croix de Guerre*, the *fourragère* of the Foreign Legion, and a pair of enormous wings, which left no possible doubt, even at a distance of fifty feet, as to which arm of the Service he adorned. The *élèves-pilotes* gasped, the eyes of the neophytes stood out from their heads, and I repressed a strong instinct to stand at attention.

There was scarcely an American at Avord who did not know and like Bullard. He was a brave, loyal, and thoroughly likable fellow, and when a quarrel with one of his superiors caused his withdrawal from the Aviation, there was scarcely an American who did not regret the fact. He was sent to the 170th French Infantry Regiment in January, 1918, from which date all trace of him has been lost.

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The Lafayette Flying Corps
by Hall + Nordhoff

DISPATCH
Bullard 1-1-1

by CMSgt Wayne L. Fisk
Director, USAF Enlisted
Heritage Hall, Gunter AFB AL

After more than seventy years, a black American aviation trailblazer has been recognized by his country. Corporal Eugene J. Bullard, a native of Columbus, Georgia, was memorialized 16 November 1988 in a ceremony at Gunter Air Force Base, Alabama.

Bullard became the world's first black pilot on 15 May 1917 and flew for France during World War I. A member of the famed Lafayette Flying Corps, Bullard claimed several aerial victories before he himself was shot down. He survived the war and lived in France until the Nazi invasion at the beginning of World War II.

A national hero of France, Bullard never received credit and recognition in this country for his remarkable footprint in aviation history. Better known are the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II and the legendary Chappie James of the Vietnam War era.

Now that has changed. In a stirring ceremony held at Gunter AFB, Corporal Eugene Bullard was memorialized through the dedication of an enlisted dormitory and the unveiling of a painting.

The painting by Niceville, Florida, resident Carl Moore, is the first definitive work of art on Bullard. Says Moore, "Very rarely does one have the opportunity to participate in a 'first' of this magnitude. I feel very privileged to help tell the story of this remarkable man."

Moore, a retired Air Force master sergeant, donated the painting to the USAF Enlisted Heritage Hall, also located at Gunter. "It's exciting to realize this painting will be permanently exhibited at Heritage Hall. I

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Bullard-2-2-2

hope it will serve as an inspiration of Eugene's legacy which is an example of man's potential in spite of adversity."

Bullard was refused a commission in the Lafayette Escadrille--the reknowned American flying unit--because of his race. Yet he never gave up his allegiance to or love for the country of his birth. Says Moore, "While creating this painting, I kept thinking of the words of Martin Luther King, Junior--about judging a man by his character, not the color of his skin." "It made me realize what a true hero Eugene was--not only as a warrior but as a patriot who cherished the best of his country even in the midst of its worst practices," Moore stated.

Eugene Bullard passed away in 1961, never recognized by this country for his contributions. That was until the Air Force and Carl Moore came along.

"These two endeavors [the building dedication and painting] have brought to light the forgotten story of this black American hero," Moore said.

"Our task now is to perpetuate his legacy--by realizing the worthiness of blacks and the quality of man."