

# VTSPOTLIGHT

Meet **Bill DeBow's** father, **Charles H. DeBow Jr.**, an Original Tuskegee Airman



Lt. Charles H. DeBow, Sept 1942

Bill DeBow, VT Group's Vice President of Business Development and Navy/Marine Corps Programs, was a Captain in the U.S. Navy and commanded the Naval Surface Warfare Center (NSWC) Port Hueneme. He followed in his father's footsteps and learned patriotism from a true American hero.

DeBow's father, Charles DeBow, was one of the first African-Americans to be commissioned in the United States Air Force. Charles' correspondence expresses his dream of flying though his father insisted he study medicine. He writes, "...Negroes didn't become aviators. They became elevator operators, and janitors, and porters like Dad. I knew all that with my head, but I kept my dreams in my heart." Eventually flying won out.

In 1938, the U.S. government sponsored the Civilian Pilot Training (CPT) program training 20,000 college students a year as civilian pilots. In 1939, the program expanded to include the historically black colleges and segregated college of Tuskegee Institute. According to CAF Red Tail Squadron "Pilots trained at Tuskegee

were primarily trained to fly fighter aircraft."

In 1942, after the War Department, renamed the Department of Defense, announced the acceptance of applications from African-Americans, Charles became one of five members of the first graduating class of the Tuskegee army flying school to complete advanced pilot training. Upon graduation, the five pilots were assigned to the "99th Fighter Squadron, the first black military flight squadron ever activated."

"This first class was one of many who would rise above racism and prejudice to serve as our nation's first black military pilots."

According to the Indianapolis Star, Charles had a decorated military career

*"...I'm flying for every one of the 12,000,000 Negroes in the United States. I want to prove that we can take a tough job and handle it just as well as a white man."*

**Charles DeBow**

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First five members of graduating class at the Tuskegee Air School (Charles DeBow, bottom right)

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First graduating class of African-American pilots U.S. Army Air Corps at Advanced Flying School Tuskegee, AL (L-R): Roberts, Davis, DeBow, Long, Ross, Curtis