

A PROPOSAL

Rename Fort Rucker to "Fort Davis" in Honor of General Benjamin O. Davis Jr



Recognizing and Honoring the Importance and Contribution of the General Davis in overcoming prejudice while demonstrating leadership that transformed the US Air Force into a more effective fighting force.

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Background: House Resolution 6395 begins the process of renaming military bases named for Confederate leaders.

Proposal: *Rename Fort Rucker to "Fort Davis" to honor General Benjamin O. Davis Jr. This recognizes his career of exceptional leadership and the extraordinary hardships of institutional racism he overcame to serve the Nation. Through his character, integrity, and mission focus, General Davis set an example of achievement that drove the Nation to an integrated service structure. From breaking the color barrier as the first African American military pilot with the Army Air Corps Tuskegee Airmen to ultimately achieving Air Force four-star rank, General Davis' life continues to inspire and motivate all Americans.*

Fort Davis would simultaneously recognize General Davis' achievements across his 34 years of commissioned service as well as the groundbreaking, ceiling shattering contributions of the 99th Pursuit Squadron and 332nd Fighter Group, the Tuskegee airmen/" Red Tails." The Tuskegee Airmen were among the first to train at Fort Rucker, an Army Air Corps post established in 1942.

General Davis, the son of the first African American Brigadier General in the Army, was appointed to USMA from Illinois and entered the class of 1936. At this time, the military was segregated, with racial prejudice common throughout the officer corps. Davis was only the fourth African American to enter West Point. Instead of celebrating his entry as a critical step towards integrating the Academy, his classmates immediately gave him the silent treatment. He was forced to room by himself throughout his four years, and his classmates rarely spoke to him outside of official duty requirements. But, as he would throughout his career, he ignored this treatment and pushed himself to prove the prejudice was unfounded and graduated in the top third of his class.

Upon graduation, his first assignment was with the 24th Infantry, where he continued to experience extreme prejudice and further ostracism. When he accepted the opportunity to join the Army Air Corps, his future and the possibility of African American integration into the armed services became real.

General Davis was the senior officer amongst the African Americans going to flight training, and the Army gave him command of the 99th Pursuit Squadron. This unit would make history and be known as the Tuskegee airmen. He took the unit to North Africa in 1943, where it saw combat for the first time. Unfortunately, prejudice continued, and some officers recommended the Air Force disband the unit, alleging poor performance. General Davis defended the record, and the unit was vindicated once and for all by its aggressive aerial victories over the Anzio beachhead – 12 enemy planes downed. He led approximately sixty combat missions himself, earning the Silver Star for a mission into Austria and the Distinguished Flying Cross on an escort mission to Munich.

General Davis advanced in rank during World War II, commanding more prominent formations to include the 332nd Fighter Group, the legendary "Red Tails." His fighter squadron had the unequalled record of never losing a bomber on over 200 escort missions. No other unit could claim that success.

After World War II, General Davis continued to serve in positions of increasing responsibility. One of the most significant assignments between World War II and Korea was to help draft the Air Force plan for implementing Executive Order 9981 ordering racial integration of the Armed Forces. His work ensured the smooth and effective integration of previously all-white units. Of note is that the Air Force was the first service to integrate. The lessons learned were vital to implementing the change in the other Services. General Davis retired from active duty as a Lt General and was promoted to a full general by President Clinton in 1998 to recognize his groundbreaking achievements and the innovations he introduced to improve the combat effectiveness of the Air Force.

After retirement, he would serve in the Department of Transportation, where he established the Air Marshal program and effectively ended hijacking. He also served as the Assistant Secretary of Transportation with responsibility for overseeing airport security.

Summary: Fort Davis will uniquely honor not only General Davis but, through him, recognize the challenge all African Americans faced as the Nation struggled with civil rights and integration.

Fact Sheet

General Davis Accomplishments in service to the Nation

- First African American to fly solo in a military aircraft
- First African American General Officer in the Air Force
- Highly regarded commander of lethal fighting formations in World War 2, including the 99th Pursuit Squadron, 332 Fighter Group ("Red Tails"), and 477th Bombardment Group. These units flew over 15,000 sorties, shot down 112 enemy planes, and destroyed or damaged another 273 on the ground.
- Set the example in his command of the "Tuskegee Airmen" of the 99th, and led the unit as it established itself as a premier fighter squadron in the European Theater
- Led his unit formations through approximately 60 combat missions
- Awarded the Silver Star and Distinguished Flying Cross along with two awards of the Distinguished Service Medal – one from the Army and the other from the Air Force
- Helped draft the Air Force plan for implementing Executive Order 9981 signed by President Truman ordering racial integration of the Armed Forces
- His leadership ability locked him onto a command track. He commanded the 477th Composite Group and Godman Air Field, the Lockbourne Army Air Base, 322nd Fighter Wing, and 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing in Korea – all with excellent readiness results.
- Other significant positions of responsibility included assignment as Chief of Staff, 12th Air Force, DCS of Operations US Air Force Europe. His most significant command was the 13th Air Force in the Philippines, consisting of over 55,000 members as a Lieutenant General
- General Davis continued to innovate in senior staff positions – most notably as the Director of Manpower and Organization and Deputy COS for Programs and Requirements. He developed a new grade standard for operational flying units, solved utilization and career path issues for officers, and increased the responsibilities of senior NCOs. His most important innovation was implementing a standardized wing organization that focused the commander on the mission with streamlined decision-making to cut out middleman staff functions.
- Other challenging commands included serving as Director of Operations for the US Air Force in Europe, Chief of Staff for the United Nations Command and US Forces in Korea, and Deputy Commander-in-Chief US Strike Command with the additional duty as Commander-in-Chief Middle East Southern Asia, and Africa
- After his military retirement, as Director of Civil Aviation Security, he headed the Federal Sky Marshal Program and effectively ended jet hijackings
- Served as Assistant Secretary of Transportation for Environment, Safety, and Consumer Affairs
- Served on the American Battle Monuments Commission
- 1992 recipient of the Langley Gold Medal from the Smithsonian Institution for outstanding contributions to the sciences of aeronautics and astronautics
- Designated a Distinguished Graduate of USMA in 1995
- Inducted into the International Air & Space Hall of Fame in 1996
- Listed as one of the 100 greatest African Americans by scholar Molefi Kete Asante
- Recipient of the Congressional Gold Medal in 2007 for distinguished achievements and contributions
- Honored by USMA by naming a barracks and USAFA naming their airfield for him

In promoting him to full General in 1998, President Clinton summed up his life and impact by saying:

"He is the very embodiment of the principle that from diversity, we can build an even stronger unity and that in diversity we can find the strength to prevail and advance."