

# 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
<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 Betacam SP videocassettes (1:48:08).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Tuskegee airman Joseph Gomer (1920 - ) 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.

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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 Betacam SP videocassettes. Tuskegee airman Joseph Gomer (1920 - ) 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:

Joseph Gomer

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Joseph Gomer--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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## 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 7/12/2012 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, August 12, 2002

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Gomer, Section A2002\_140\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:25  
2002/08/12

Joseph Philip Gomer was born in Iowa Falls, Iowa, on June 20, 1920, to Eula Irving and Philip Joseph Gomer. He has one brother and knows very little about his family's history other than his aunt who was W.E.B. DuBois' first wife. His heritage is African American, German, and Cherokee. Gomer describes growing up in an integrated town during the Great Depression where he received an excellent education and helped his father's custodial business. Gomer graduated from Iowa Falls High School in 1938, the same year his father died. He graduated from Ellsworth Junior College in 1940 where he learned to fly airplanes. Gomer then experiences segregation when he traveled to Tuskegee after enlisting in the army 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  
2002/08/12

Joseph Gomer discusses his training as a fighter pilot in Tuskegee, Alabama. He had excellent instructors including Daniel "Chappie" James Jr., but noted that the slightest infraction was an excuse not to graduate black pilots. They had to read the manual and become comfortable enough with the cockpit controls to pass a blindfold test before they could fly. Gomer discusses the types of aircraft and the deployment of the 332nd Fighter Group to Italy. They flew strafing missions, convey patrols, and then escorted bomber missions. Gomer relates a few particularly memorial missions that he flew such as an episode that resulted in wind burn to his eyes. He credits Bill Davis for the success of the 332nd never losing a bomber to enemy fighters that gained their reputation as "Red Tail Angels." Gomer asked to be rotated after he had flown sixty-eight missions.

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  
2002/08/12

Joseph Gomer describes V-mail and recalls a mission where his plane was shot. Gomer discusses the statistics of men lost in the war and why he asked to be rotated out in 1944. He shares his experiences of segregated treatment as a veteran in the United States and at Chanute Air Force Base in the 1940s before describing his experiences integrating the military as the first black officer in Langley, Virginia, and overseas with the 483rd Troop Carrier Group during the Korean War during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Gomer appreciates that one of the Tuskegee Airmen's biggest jobs was to help integrate when there was opportunity. After his 1964 discharge, Gomer moved to Duluth, Minnesota, and worked for the United States Forestry Service for twenty-one years where he received a superior service award from the Department of Agriculture for his

nationally renowned work with women and minorities.  
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  
2002/08/12

Joseph Gomer is proud of the fact that he, as a Tuskegee Airman, helped to change things. He would like to keep educating young people and pushing them to do more. Gomer is a little disappointed that more young people are not taking advantage of the opportunities that exist today. Gomer would like to be remembered as someone who is caring and tried to do as much as he could for his fellow man.