

## **Rose AMERICA 250 (095, 1997) Transcript**

**Biographical Sketch:** Sherman Rose served as a civilian flight instructor for the Tuskegee Airmen during World War 2. Raised in Oklahoma, he transferred to Tuskegee Institute in 1939, and upon graduation became an instructor in Tuskegee's Department of Aeronautics and later as a Primary flight instructor to African American USAAF pilots. After the war, Rose eventually found work as a civilian helicopter pilot instructor at Fort Rucker, Alabama.

### **00:00:00 Marty Olliff**

Sherman Rose was Dothan's Tuskegee Airman from World War II. Born in Missouri and raised in Oklahoma, he attended Tuskegee Institute and became a civilian flight instructor at the Tuskegee Army Air Corps Base there, 1939 to 1946. Dothan has commemorated him with a mural at the corner of North St. Andrews Street and East Main Street.

These excerpts are from an interview conducted by Scott Seelock in 1997 as part of a Houston Academy oral history assignment. Mr. Rose passed away in 2008.

In this clip, Mr. Rose tells his name and where he was born and raised.

### **00:00:48 Sherman Rose**

Sherman Twitchell Rose. I was born in Missouri, raised in Oklahoma.

### **00:00:53 Marty Olliff**

Mr. Rose talks about transferring to Tuskegee Institute.

### **00:00:57 Sherman Rose**

I came to Tuskegee in 1939. The reason I went to Tuskegee is possibly a long story. I was supposed to go to Hampton Institute, Virginia, but I couldn't make it. My mother and father had already put three boys in college when I came along. They told me that the money was running kind of short, see what you can do in Tuskegee.

And she said, "Go on to Tuskegee, and if you go to Tuskegee, God will bless you." So I think I was blessed by going to Tuskegee.

I was enrolled in the school. I took building construction. That's what I was pursuing when I started flying. Well, the first year I was there, they started a pilot training program. It was called the Civilian Pilot Training Program at Tuskegee. And I enrolled into the second class that had this training.

But I finished with the first class. Now that's an interesting story. While I finished with the first class, we had a small airport and it needed a hangar. And being in building construction, I was pretty good at that. My instructor left me in charge of the people building the hangar. And then while after I get everybody going to work, I would take the airplane out and fly it around. And that's where I built up my time so I could finish up with the first class. That's the reason I finished with the very first class that flies at Tuskegee.

**00:02:24 Marty Olliff**

Mr. Rose discusses his role as a civilian flight instructor for the Tuskegee Airmen.

**00:02:31 Sherman Rose**

When I finished the flight school, at that particular time, there wasn't much to do. I left school and went to Xenia, Ohio. I had a brother living up there, and I went to visit him and I thought I'd go to work and make some money.

After I made the application for the work, I received a telegram from Tuskegee asking me to come back. They had another course of flight training to take, and I took that. I was put on the faculty at Tuskegee Institute as an instructor in the Tuskegee Institute Division of Aeronautics.

As an instructor there, my first job was teaching the members of the 99th Assault Squadron, where I just started the cadets. It was called the Army Air Force Primary Program at that time, so we stayed there and taught Air Force Primary.

The members of the 99th Assault Squadron, 332nd Fighter Group, all became famous aviators in the Army Air Force. Benjamin O. Davis and Chappie James were two of the first students with the Tuskegee Airmen.

One of our first students at the time was Captain Benjamin O. Davis. He was the most recent black West Point graduate. He had finished in 1936. I think during the four years that he was at West Point, he received the silent treatment. Nobody talked to him for four years. But he was determined. He was a very intelligent, very smart, very upright man. He became the Air Force's first black general.

Of course, we had other students. One of the students that started after he started flying became the first four-star general, General Chappie James. We had good students there, a lot of them that went to combat and came back, stayed in the Air Force.

Those that got out of the Air Force, they ended up with good jobs. A lot of them I can recall are presidents of big corporations, the vice presidency, and one was the vice president of Eastern Airlines at one time.

**00:04:44 Marty Olliff**

Even when they received commissions as officers and wings as pilots, the Tuskegee Airmen faced racial discrimination.

**00:04:52 Sherman Rose**

I think 1941 or '42 when they started allowing them to fly. After they got into the flight training part of it and all of that and received their commission and all, they were not accepted hardly anywhere other than at Tuskegee. In fact, they had to boycott and sue to get into the officers' clubs.

It was difficult at that time for a military personnel being Black, because that was just a period in time when it was politically incorrect to be black, to put it that way.

**00:05:26 Marty Olliff**

Mr. Rose ends by talking about the closure of Tuskegee Army Air Corps Base.

**00:05:32 Sherman Rose**

Base closed down in Tuskegee in about 1943 or '44. They closed down the pilot training in Tuskegee. They declared that they didn't need that school any longer.

I was surprised when I came back there to visit that I had closed the field down. They had even closed down the Tuskegee Army Airfield. That was closed down. You go up there now, it doesn't even look like it was never an airport. They got the runways there with fence posts on through them, but it's not used as an airport anymore.