

ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION No. 237

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MARCH 15, 2021

Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman ANNETTE QUIJANO

District 20 (Union)

Assemblyman ANTHONY S. VERRELLI

District 15 (Hunterdon and Mercer)

Assemblywoman CLEOPATRA G. TUCKER

District 28 (Essex)

Co-Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman Dunn

SYNOPSIS

Honors life of Tuskegee Airman Shade Meshack Lee.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 6/3/2021)

AR237 QUIJANO, VERRELLI

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1 AN ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION honoring the life of Tuskegee Airman
2 Shade Meshack Lee.
3
4 WHEREAS, Master Sergeant Shade Meshack Lee was a member of the
5 famed Tuskegee Airmen during World War II and a longtime
6 resident of Elizabeth, New Jersey; and
7 WHEREAS, Prior to the United States' entry into World War II, Black
8 people were denied the opportunity to assist in military air
9 operations out of the belief they were not sophisticated enough to
10 work with complex aircraft; and
11 WHEREAS, In 1940, after lobbying by various civil rights groups,
12 President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced that the Army Air
13 Corps would begin training Black pilots at the Tuskegee Army
14 Airfield in Tuskegee, Alabama; and
15 WHEREAS, Many of the trainees were college graduates who went on
16 to serve as pilots, navigators, bombardiers, instructors, mechanics,
17 control tower operators, and support staff; and
18 WHEREAS, The "Tuskegee Airmen" as they were called, earned more
19 than 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 744 Air Medals, 14 Bronze
20 Stars, eight Purple Hearts, two Soldier Medals, one Silver Star, one
21 Legion of Merit, one Red Star of Yugoslavia, three
22 Presidential/Distinguished Unit Citations, and more than 300
23 Congressional Medals of Honor; and
24 WHEREAS, As a result of their brave service, the Tuskegee Airmen
25 helped pave the way for the issuance of Executive Order 9881 by
26 President Harry S. Truman which ordered the desegregation of the
27 Armed Forces in 1948; and
28 WHEREAS, As a young man, Mr. Lee joined the Civilian Conservation
29 Corps (CCC), a New Deal program to hire unemployed men for
30 public conservation jobs, and became a radio telegrapher, obtained
31 his high school equivalency diploma and taught fellow CCC
32 workers a technique he devised to speed the flow of messages they
33 were learning to send and receive in Morse Code; and
34 WHEREAS, After the CCC and repeatedly being turned down for
35 employment because of his race, Mr. Lee joined the military; and
36 WHEREAS, In the military, Mr. Lee was a communications chief and
37 flight line technical inspector with the all-Black 553rd Replacement
38 Training Squadron, part of the Tuskegee Airmen, formed to train
39 pilots to replace those returning from overseas flight missions; and
40 WHEREAS, The army base where Mr. Lee was stationed strictly
41 enforced the segregation customs of the era; and
42 WHEREAS, The segregation was not only devastating to the morale of
43 the Black soldiers, it also hindered the productivity of the black and
44 white units and the army base overall because personnel were being
45 assigned based on race, not on the needs of the mission or what the
46 men were capable of doing; and

1 **WHEREAS**, Mr. Lee consulted with a Major from the Air Force about
2 the situation, and this led to the racial integration of the flight line,
3 Black and white soldiers working side by side for the benefit of the
4 mission; and

5 **WHEREAS**, Through numerous correspondence, military, and college-
6 level courses, Mr. Lee became proficient in fields that included
7 ultrasonics, electronics, advanced mathematics, radar microwave
8 and engineering; and

9 **WHEREAS**, One of Mr. Lee's major contributions to the military was
10 developing an ultrasonic device used to simulate booming missions
11 for men training to become fighter pilots; and

12 **WHEREAS**, Mr. Lee spent 20-plus years in military service and after
13 retiring, he held a variety of technological positions including radar
14 technician at Newark International Airport, resident engineer of the
15 data processing center for Saks Fifth Avenue, marine service
16 engineer, computer engineer, and microwave engineer for NBC
17 Studios, New York; and

18 **WHEREAS**, Mr. Lee consulted on the role of the Tuskegee Airmen in
19 the movie "Red Tails" released in 2012, and, along with other
20 Tuskegee Airmen, was featured in People magazine; and

21 **WHEREAS**, Mr. Lee and his six brothers received recognition from the
22 United States government for being one of two families to have
23 seven active duty sons contributing to the World War II effort; and

24 **WHEREAS**, In March 2007, Mr. Lee, and fellow Tuskegee Airmen,
25 was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by President George
26 W. Bush; and

27 **WHEREAS**, Mr. Lee had a passion for books and learning, and penned
28 his memoirs and shared his life experiences through public
29 speaking and presentations to students and church members to
30 preserve the history of the Tuskegee Airmen for younger
31 generations; and

32 **WHEREAS**, Sadly, Master Sergeant Lee passed away on October 17,
33 2016 at the age of 95; and

34 **WHEREAS**, As we lose more members of the Greatest Generation each
35 day, it is important to recognize the accomplishments of men like
36 Master Sergeant Lee who selflessly served our nation while
37 overcoming racial segregation and prejudice; now, therefore,

38
39 **BE IT RESOLVED** *by the General Assembly of the State of New*
40 *Jersey:*

41
42 1. This House proudly honors Master Sergeant Shade Meshack
43 Lee for his lifetime service to our nation and his role in helping to
44 bring about desegregation of the United States Armed Forces as a
45 member of the Tuskegee Airmen.

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2 of 95. As we lose more members of the Greatest Generation each
3 day, it is important to recognize the accomplishments of men like
4 Master Sergeant Lee who selflessly served our nation while
5 overcoming racial segregation and prejudice. His legacy will
6 inspire people for decades to come.