

Samuel Broadnax Class of 2013



Mr. Samuel L. Broadnax (deceased) attended Oroville High School (OHS) from 1941-1944, and left school two months into his senior year, to enlist in the United States Army Air Corps during WW II and became one of a unique group of fighter pilots known as the Tuskegee Airmen. His official enlistment date was November 17, 1944 at the Presidio of Monterey. Official enlistment was *“for the duration of the War, or other emergency, plus six months, subject to the discretion of the President (of the United States) or otherwise according to law.”*

Sammy, as he was known, grew up in Oroville and while at OHS was active in football and track. His football coach described him as a “fleet footed end” and commended him for “excellent line play.” In 1943, he was the light-heavy weight school boxing champion. He was also a member of Block O, the campus Air Corps Club and community Boy Scout Troop 29.

From the time he was a young boy, Samuel was fascinated by airplanes and made model planes, watched daredevils stain the sky, and enjoyed grounded planes at carnivals. His dream was, “To become a pursuit pilot and help shoot down German ME-109’s and FW-190’s. He was fortunate enough to fulfill most of his dream, flying P-51’s in Italy and Germany, and earning many medals, but never actually flew a combat mission. He was all prepared for his first combat mission when the atomic bomb was dropped.

Samuel completed training at the Tuskegee Army Air Base in Alabama and was commissioned Flight Officer Samuel L. Broadnax, Tuskegee Airman. The Tuskegee Airmen were officially founded in 1941 and based in Alabama. They were the first all African-American Fighter Group ever created in the U. S. Army Air Force. The Tuskegee Airmen Unit earned 3 Distinguished Citations during WW II and 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses. Military segregation was officially ended by President Truman in 1948. Three Tuskegee airmen went on to attain the rank of general in the U. S. Army.

Following his honorable discharge from the war, Flight Officer Broadnax returned to a very discriminating America. There were no aviation jobs in the USA for African Americans. Samuel then attended Yuba College, The University of California at Berkeley and Howard University. He was a graduate of the Columbia School of Broadcasting. During his life he worked as a newscaster for the radio station KSFO in San Francisco and was also a journalist. Later in life, he served as ‘technical director’ on the movie “Hart’s War”, starring Bruce Willis.

In 2007, in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol, President George W. Bush awarded the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor to this distinguished group of pilots who were still living and their widows. Samuel was present to accept this prestigious award.

Flight Officer Broadnax authored a book, “Blue Skies, Black Wings: African American Pioneers of Aviation”. The book is about World War II and the first generation of African Americans who served formally in the U.S Army Air Corps and Forces. It is also about the domestic race war that took place on the ground and in the air.

Book Review Excerpt: *“Broadnax is a rememberer and a reminder. In Blue Skies, Black Wings, he elides the distinction between history and memory. He remembers his aerial aspirations ripening. He recalls the black men and women who flew before him.”*

Flight Officer Broadnax returned to Oroville in 2006 to act as Grand Marshall of the Veteran's Day Parade and was guest speaker at the Oroville Exchange Club. When asked about being honored with a 'Special Day' in Oakland in 2004, by then Mayor Jerry Brown, Samuel said that other Tuskegee Airmen present were the real heroes. He was said to be far more willing to discuss his fellow Tuskegee Airmen than himself.

One of his passions was working with youth and he became the Director of "The Summer Flight Academy" in Oakland, CA. This project taught at-risk youth in the inner city about discipline and promoted their interest in aviation. The academy affiliates with the College of Alameda.

Flight Officer Broadnax died on October 7, 2009 at his home in Sacramento and was honored at a memorial service in Marysville. He was 84.