
Early Aeronautics Program

at

West Virginia State College
Institute, West Virginia



A CONTRIBUTION TO WORLD WAR II

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Dedicated to the brave, loyal
and patriotic students of the
Civilian Pilot Training Program
of West Virginia State College
On the twenty-fifth anniversary
of its inception.

INTRODUCTION

Since the attention of the world is now focused on the space age, it seems appropriate to document a small but important contribution that West Virginia State College has made for its success.

All writers of local or institutional history are aware of the fact that, on the one hand, the further one is away from the events in time, the more objective one becomes; while on the other hand, the evidence and primary sources become scarcer and scarcer. Therefore apology is extended for all errors of omission and commission.

Acknowledgement is hereby tendered to Mr. James C. Evans of the Defense Department for inspiring interest in this subject; to Mr. Joseph W. Grider and Mr. Hector C. Strong for the use of their personal files of letters and clippings; and to the Negro press for its untiring efforts to launch and support this program.

September, 1964.

John C. Harlan
Associate Professor of History
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CONTRIBUTION OF WEST VIRGINIA STATE COLLEGE TO THE EARLY AERONAUTICS PROGRAM

One of the unique features of West Virginia State College seldom recognized, and easily forgotten, is its contributions to aviation.

West Virginia State College was
among three hundred ninety-nine institutions offering academic work in aviation or related fields;¹
the first college for Negroes to offer Civilian Pilot Training Program approved by the Civil Aeronautics Authority;
the first and only CPT Seaplane Unit in a college for Negroes;
the first CPT program to train a Negro college woman pilot on land planes;
the first CPT program to place a man and a woman staff member in an established Unit of the Civil Air Patrol in West Virginia;
the first college for Negroes with two graduates in the United States Army Air Corps receiving wings and commissions among the first five flyers attaining officer's rank in the 99th Pursuit Squadron.

These accomplishments took place during the crucial years of 1939-1942.

In 1939, the Federal government allotted four million dollars for a Civilian Pilot Training Program in universities, colleges and high schools throughout the nation. Its objective in general was to build an Air Corps second to none to meet the demands of our participation in World War II.

More specifically, the objectives of the training program at West Virginia State College were to prepare the Negro for any and all opportunities which might open to him in the future. The prevalent opinion was that he could not wait for the opportunity and then prepare for it. Instead, he should be ready when the opportunity arises.

Prior to 1939, it had been customarily believed that "there was no room in the air for Negro pilots." If the Negro was to be given any status at all in aviation, it should be in segregated units. This view was strongly supported by officials in the office of the Assistant Secretary of War for Aviation. To counteract this opinion and to prove the capability and the loyalty of the Negro as a citizen, President John W. Davis sent Mr. James C. Evans and Mr. Joseph W. Grider to Washington, D. C., in July, 1939, to contact the proper officials of the Civil Aeronautics Authority to get approval for the college to participate in the program. Armed with a sound program, and

¹A *Survey of Collegiate Courses in Aviation*. Annual Council on Education. Washington. August, 1946.

with endorsement of federal and state officials, approval was granted on September 11, 1939. The successful implementation of this program while it was in its infancy was due largely to the untiring efforts of Mr. James C. Evans, Coordinator; Mr. F. J. Lacy, Assistant Coordinator; and to Mr. Joseph W. Grider, ground school instructor.

Mr. James C. Evans was the Director of Trade and Technical Education and the Administrative Assistant to the President. In 1942, he was Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War. On February 15, 1956, the Department of Defense gave him an award and a citation for his outstanding contribution to the department in the field of racial relations. Today, Mr. Evans is Counsellor in the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense. He is constantly on demand to fulfill many speaking engagements throughout the country.

Mr. Frederick J. Lacy is now the Chairman of the Department of Technical Science and on the faculty of the college.

Mr. Joseph W. Grider, who owned his own airplane, was elected President of the Kanawha branch of the National Airmen's Association of America. This was an organization for student trainees, pilots, instructors, and other interested personnel. He was previously regional Vice-President and represented this area at the first National Air Conference which met in Chicago in 1939. Mr. Grider is still a member of the faculty in the Department of music.

Subsequent to the establishment of the Civilian Pilot Training Program at West Virginia State College, five other Negro colleges and the National Airmen's Association of America were included in the national list of approximately four hundred colleges and universities throughout the country, to offer pilot training. These colleges were: Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina; Delaware State College for Colored Students; Hampton Institute; Howard University; and Tuskegee Institute.² Other Negro colleges joined later.

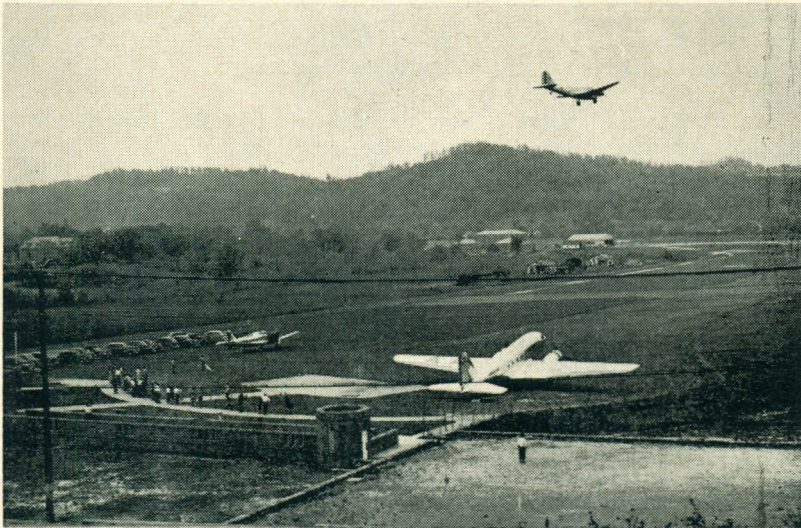
The Civilian Pilot Training Program for Negroes which was first developed at West Virginia State College, and subsequently in other Negro colleges, was the foundation for the Tuskegee Army Air Field. Students who had finished primary training and had received their Civilian Pilot Licenses were sent to Tuskegee for advanced training.

One of the unique features of the Civilian Pilot Training Program at West Virginia State College was that it was probably the first educational institution in West Virginia, and certainly the first college for Negroes to develop racial integration by enrolling a number of qualified white trainees into a flight unit in the summer of 1940.

²Contact. May, 1941. p. 25.

It may also be asserted that this development, as much as any other, provided one of the spearheads for integration in the armed forces, and also paved the way for school integration throughout the south.

The flight program at West Virginia State College was conducted at nearby Wertz Field located west of the college campus. Key courses of their program consisted of ground and flight instruction, civil air regulation, general service of aircraft, radio, communication, navigation, and related work in meteorology. The curriculum for these pilot trainees included seventy-two hours of ground school and thirty-five hours of actual flight training.



A VIEW OF WERTZ FIELD

A proposed outline of their basic courses is as follows:³

FIRST YEAR

FIRST SEMESTER		SECOND SEMESTER	
English Composition	3 hrs.	English Composition	3 hrs.
Language (Spanish Pref.)	3	Language (Spanish Pref.)	3
College Algebra	3	Analytical Geometry	4
Trigonometry	3	General Chemistry	4
General Chemistry	4	Mechanical Drawing	1
Mechanical Drawing	3	Plane Surveying and Spherical Trigonometry	2
		Radio Laboratory	1
Total	18	Total	18

³Civilian Pilot Training Conference for Negro Colleges. Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia. December 8-9, 1941.

SECOND YEAR

FIRST SEMESTER

English Literature	2 hrs.
Language (Spanish Pref.)	3
General Physics (Lecture)	2
General Physics (Lab)	2
Differential Calculus	4
Aircraft Drafting	2
Radio (Lab)	1
*Primary Navigation	1
*Aeronautical Meteorology	1
*Primary Civil Air Regulations	½
*General Service of Aircraft	½
*Primary Flight Training	(Credit)
Total	19

SECOND SEMESTER

Language (Spanish Pref.)	3 hrs.
General Physics (Lecture)	2
General Physics (Lab)	2
Analytical Mechanics	3
Integral Calculus	4
*Aircraft Structure and Maintenance	1
*Practical Aerodynamics	1
*Airplane Power Plants	1½
*Radio and Celestial Navig.	½
*General Service of Aircraft	½
Radio (Lab)	½
*Secondary Flight Training	(Credit)
Total	19

From 1939 to 1941, there were seventy trainees enrolled in the pilot training program at West Virginia State College. The Pioneers of this training program consisted of twenty students enrolled in Unit I and Unit II during the term of 1939-1940. They were:⁴



UNIT I, C.P.T.P.

*C.P.T.P. Controlled Private and Secondary Pilot Training.

⁴T and T Report. West Virginia State College. June, 1941, p. 160-161.

UNIT I (FALL 1939)

Davis, L. D.
Eagleston, Wilson V.
Fields, Marshall L.
Hathcock, Lloyd S.
Jackson, Ralph E.
Minor, Charles D., Jr.
Rolls, Rose Agnes
Ross, Mac
Strong, Hector C.
Wilson, Edward L.

UNIT II (SPRING 1940)

Alexander, William A.
Brown, Charles S.
Cardwell, Charles S.
Dowell, Alfonso L.
Harper, James T.
Harris, Leroy P.
Hester, Andrew H.
Layne, Dorothy A.
Robinson, Robert L., Jr.
Rogers, Daniel A.

Unit III and Unit IV included thirty more trainees who entered this program during the summer of 1940.

The students in these units had the unusual experience of having an accelerated program in training because of the acute need for trained pilots and supporting crews. They were:⁵

UNIT III

Bird, L. E.
Bondurant, Alvin M.
Cassey, Peter W.
Davis, Raymond E.
Denson, Charles K.
Johnson, Langdon E.
Livers, Arthur A.
McGhee, Leonard E.
Moret, Adolph J.
Rainey, Octava J.
Roberts, George S.
Rolls, Theodore E.
Shaik, Mohamed J.
White, Edward L.
Ross, Charles C.

UNIT IV

Franz, Jacob H.
Gore, Alphonso E.
Grandon, Harry M.
Hunter, John H.
James, Edward L.
Koontz, Arthur B.
Kewsisto, Ruth M.
Nicholas, Paul R.
Ott, Roderick W.
Pleasant, Brent
Slingerland, Chester A.
Smoot, Esther R.
Stephens, John M.
Southerland, Woodford
Wells, Johnson C.

Unit V with ten trainees completed its works in the first semester of 1940-1941. This unit's work was characterized by high achievement and high grades on final examinations. One trainee achieved a perfect score of 100 in the examination on civil air regulations.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 162-163.

Unit VI also consisted of ten trainees, and they began their courses of study in the spring term of 1941.

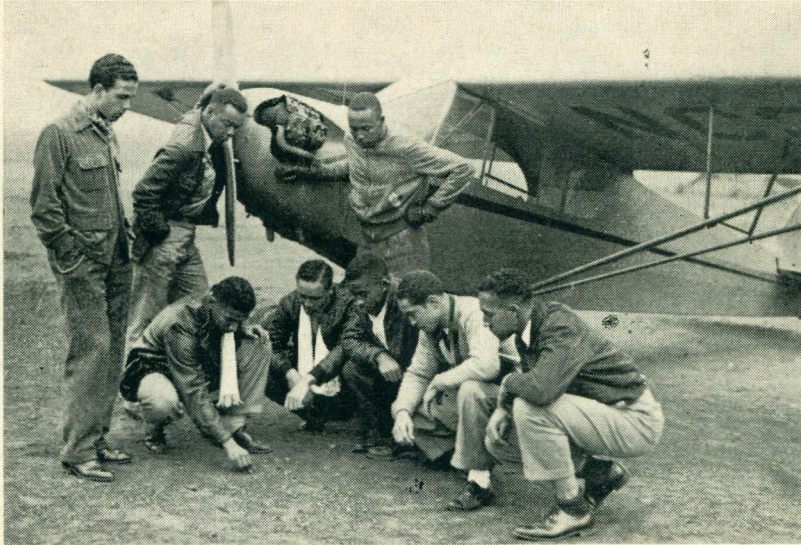
The students of these units were:⁶

UNIT V (FALL 1940)

Belcher, S. J.
Brown, Lloyd
Burns, Arthur E.
Gray, George E.
Gray, William M.
Hairston, Robert T.
Hayes, Herbert S.
Johnson, Everette A., Jr.
Long, Benjamin F.
Rolbert, Reginald P.

UNIT VI (SPRING 1941)

Allen, Clarence W.
Bentley, Melvin J.
Brooks, Andrew J.
Bynum, Rolin A.
Edward, William H.
Flowers, Edward S.
Gore, Blinzy L.
Harris, Cassius A.
Oliver, George B.
Parker, Mary L.



A NAVIGATION PROBLEM

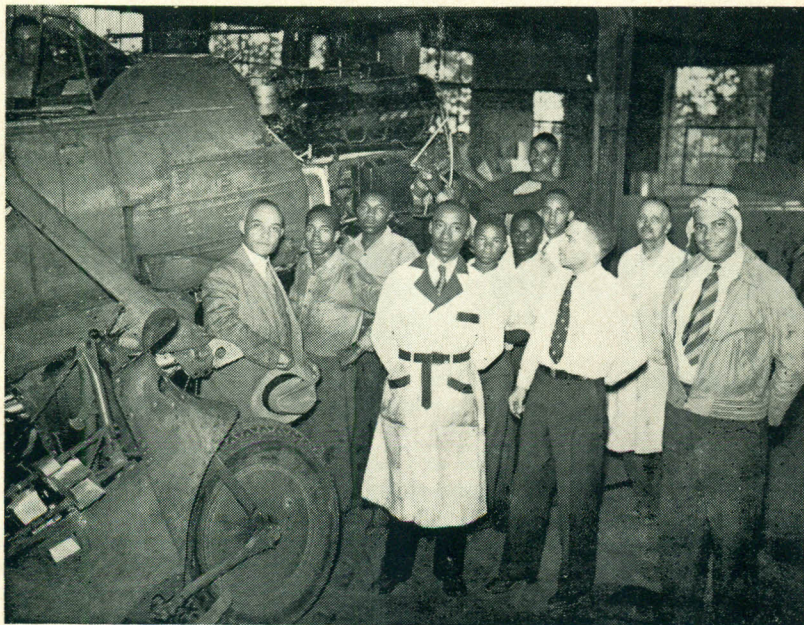
All of the student trainees and persons interested in aviation received aid and encouragement from the Kanawha branch of the National Airmen's Association. At the first conference of the National Airmen's Association in August, 1939, this organization went on record to support the application of West Virginia State College for the Civilian Pilot Training Program that was before the Civil Aeronautics Authority. Through the efforts of this organization and the Chicago Defender, two goodwill flyers, Mr. Chauncey Spencer

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 164-165.

and Mr. Dale White, made a tour of Negro Colleges to create interest in flying. A stop at West Virginia State College was given high priority. The National Airmen's Association also contributed to aviation nationally by editing a monthly bulletin called "Contact," which carried news items and photographs of the association in all parts of the country. This bulletin was written and published under the direction of Mr. Robert E. King.

From the number of students who received training in the Civilian Pilot Program at West Virginia State College, many of them volunteered for service in the United States Army Air Corps. They received further flight and technical training in the 99th Pursuit Squadron at the new Army air base in Tuskegee, Alabama. The goal of integrating the armed forces was finally accomplished by a member of Flight III, who finished his primary course in the summer of 1940 and his advanced training at Tuskegee in 1941. He is George Spencer Roberts. He became the first Negro examined and accepted for appointment in the United States Army Air Corps.⁷ He is still on active duty, serving his country with distinction in the rank of Colonel.

Racial integration was another unique feature of the Civilian Pilot Training Program at West Virginia State College. White trainees, both men and women, were enrolled in Flight Unit IV during the



INSPECTION OF AIRPLANE MAINTENANCE

⁷Ibid., p. 153.

summer of 1940. Complete racial integration was effected without incident. It may be noted that this was fourteen years before the Supreme Court's famous school integration case.

Another unique feature of the Civilian Pilot Training Program at West Virginia State College was its inclusion of women. It had been requested that the course of study be limited to men only. In Flight Unit I, the faculty and staff enrolled Miss Rose Agnes Rolls. After completing her training, Miss Rolls became the first girl of her race, and one of the first girls in the country to receive a private pilot's license.

The ground and flight training at Wertz Field was so successful that an approval was granted for the development of the first CAA inland seaplane unit on the Kanawha River near West Virginia State College. This project was the first established seaplane unit for Negro trainees in the United States. Later it became known as the Kanawha Flying School of Charleston, West Virginia. All of the trainees came from Flight Unit VI. This unit consisting of ten students included Miss Mary L. Parker of Erie, Pennsylvania, who became the first lady of her race to enter into seaplane training under the Civilian Pilot Training Program.⁸



MARY L. PARKER, '41, FIRST WOMAN TO RECEIVE SEAPLANE TRAINING

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 158.

In life one must take the bitter along with the sweet. The training program had its share of misfortunes. The most tragic one at West Virginia State College involved Mr. Troy Newkirke and Miss Esther Smoot of Flight Unit IV. Mr. Newkirke, a CAA flight instructor, was teaching Miss Smoot "confidence" at the controls on August 22, 1940, when the Piper Cub trainer ship struck two telephone wires and crazily plunged into the muddy Kanawha River. Mr. Newkirke was killed. Miss Smoot, an expert swimmer, reached shore, but not before she fought off the terrible exhaustion caused by her heroic effort to extricate Newkirke from the demolished plane.⁹

Although the Civilian Pilot Training Program opened the field of aviation to all qualified Negroes for the first time in the history of our country, many individual Negroes had been flying much earlier. All of them had to do it the hard way. The cost of earning a private pilot's license under the CAA was only \$40.00. But in 1932 a flying course cost Mr. C. Alfred Anderson, a flight instructor at Howard University, \$6,000. Undoubtedly, he was the first member of his race to earn a commercial pilot's license. In 1928, Anderson took his first step in learning to fly. He purchased a \$3,000 plane, and hired an instructor at \$10.00 an hour to teach him to fly at an airport near his home at Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. It took him until 1932 to earn his commercial pilot license, but not until he had spent more than \$6,000 in lessons and the purchase of a new plane to replace his original machine.¹⁰



A TRAINING PLANE—WERTZ FIELD

⁹*The Pittsburgh Courier*. (date line) August 22, 1940.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, December 7, 1942.

West Virginia State College was the first Negro college to have a Civilian Pilot Training Program to be approved by the CAA for such training; the first to enroll Negro women; the first to have a Seaplane Unit in a Negro College; and, above all, the first school to pave the way for complete integration in the armed forces. These pioneering deeds at West Virginia State College have proven completely false the notion that there was "no room in the air for Negroes in aviation." Through this program at this college and other Negro colleges, outstanding Negro aviators have served our country throughout many parts of the world. All one has to do is to look at the notable record made during World War II of the 99th Pursuit Squadron; the 100th and 32nd Fighter Units; and the 447th Bomber Group.

As a result of the record of the training in Negro colleges, and the splendid war record, the current policy and practice of complete integrated pilot training is now being conducted by the United States Air Force at Randolph Field, San Antonio, Texas. These are only a few of the many unforgettable achievements and early contributions of the pioneering men and women who took their Civilian Pilot Training Program at Wertz Field. It is with pride and sincere respect that because of the foresight of the administration and staff of West Virginia State College, it is recorded in history for all to know of the role that West Virginia State College played during the early years in the elimination of racial discrimination in Aviation and eventually in the armed forces. This was one of the most profitable and rewarding investments in human relations.



REPAIRING AN AIRPLANE



ROSE AGNES ROLLS, '40, FIRST WOMAN GRADUATE

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