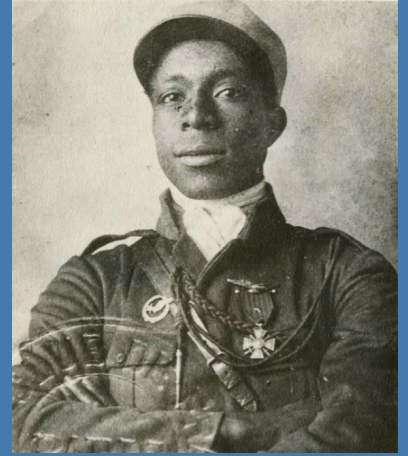


Eugene “Jacques” Bullard



Eugene “Jacques” Bullard: October 9, 1895 – October 12, 1961

He was the first African-American pilot to fight in combat for the U.S.A., and the only African-American who fought World War I, serving for the French military as a pilot.

In 1917, Eugene "Jacques" Bullard, became the world's first African-American military pilot to fly in combat, and the only African-American pilot in World War I. Born in Columbus, Georgia, Bullard's education was minimal, but he learned to read well which was a key to his later success. In 1912, Bullard left the U.S.A. in hopes of escaping racial discrimination, and stowed away on a German merchant ship bound for Aberdeen, Scotland. In Europe, he performed in a vaudeville troupe and earned money as a prizefighter. At the beginning of World War I, Bullard joined the French army, serving in the Moroccan Division of the 170th Infantry Regiment. The French government awarded him the Croix de Guerre for his bravery at the Battle of Verdun. Twice wounded and declared unfit for infantry service, he requested assignment for flight training and amassed a distinguished record in the air.

Between the wars, Bullard owned nightclubs in the Montmartre district of Paris, France where he emerged as a leading personality among such African-American entertainers as Josephine Baker, Louis Armstrong, and Sidney Bechet. In the late 1930's, Bullard joined a French counterintelligence group. When Nazi Germany conquered France in 1940, Bullard and his family escaped to New York City where he spent the rest of his life working in a variety of jobs, his last being an elevator operator at the Rockefeller Center, before passing away in 1961. During his lifetime, Bullard was awarded 15 French war medals, was one of three men chosen to relight the everlasting flame at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Paris, was made a Knight of the Legion of Honor, the highest ranking order and decoration bestowed in France, and was buried with full honors by the Federation of French War Officers. Despite all of these honors, few in the US knew of his legendary accomplishments. His contribution to aviation wasn't formally recognized until 1994, when the United States Air Force posthumously awarded him as a Second Lieutenant.

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