

Black Thunder

Chapter Eight – by Kay Hively

It was barely daylight when the truck rolled out of the yard. Joey watched out the windows as he sat between his parents. The old truck seemed to move slowly because Joey was eager to get to Tuskegee.

At noon, the family stopped along the highway and had dinner from Mrs. Cooper's basket. An hour later, they arrived at a big open gate. A large sign said "Tuskegee Army Air Field."

Mr. Cooper parked in a field where there were many other cars and trucks.

The Cooper family then walked quickly to a place where people were waiting for the graduation ceremony. Joey was excited even though he hardly knew what he was doing. He and his parents found seats on a set of bleachers like he had seen at the high school. Almost immediately, a group of old men in uniforms walked up on a little stage in front of the bleachers.

Some of the men gave speeches, and then some young men in uniform began walking across the platform. As each one stepped forward, his name was called out. Joey held his breath until he heard "Thomas Cooper." Joey was so excited he stood up to get a better look. When his brother's name was called, Joey heard his mother gasp. He turned to see a tear roll down her cheek. And, although Joey could hardly believe it, his father had tears on his face, too.

After the cadets had graduated, the new airmen rushed up into the bleachers looking for their families. Joey yelled and waved at Tommy who came bounding up the steps.

Tommy led his family out behind some big buildings so they could see the Tuskegee airplanes. Joey could hardly speak as he stood looking at all the airplanes. The planes were P-40s and they all had red tails. It was the grandest sight he had ever seen.

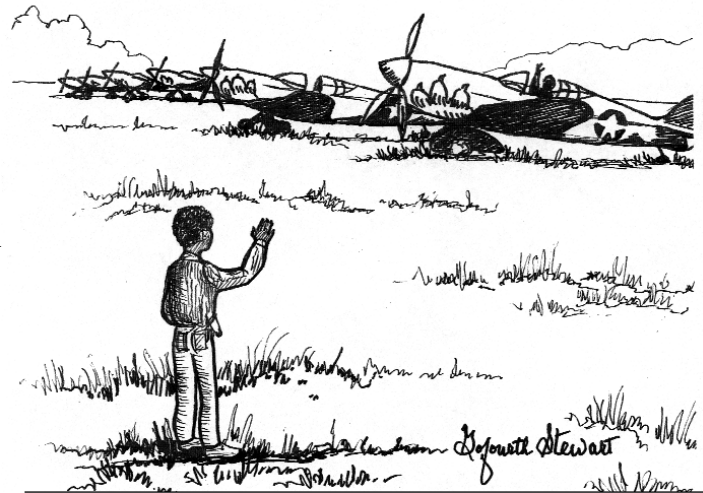
As the Cooper family walked around looking at the airplanes, Tommy said he would be leaving in one of those airplanes the

next morning. He said pilots were needed in the war, and he was eager to do his duty. He said he was very proud to be a Tuskegee Airman. His eyes sparkled when he vowed that the Tuskegee Airmen would be as quick as lightning and would roar like black thunder.

Joey asked about Dr. Carver. Tommy kneeled down beside his little brother, removed his cap, and said that Dr. Carver had died in January – not long after Christmas.

With this news Joey realized that both his heroes were going away from Tuskegee. He began to wonder if maybe he could come here and be like Tommy and Dr. Carver. He wasn't sure if he should be a pilot or a scientist. But as he looked at Tommy in his uniform, Joey knew that anything was possible.

Looking at his brother, he imaged that the world was just waiting for him to grow up and do something wonderful. And that's what Joey planned to do.



Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Missouri. Produced in partnership with this newspaper and the Missouri Press Foundation. Copyright 2004.

Classroom Extensions

Things to Think About and Do –

A. When Joey saw his brother in his uniform, why did he think anything was possible? Do you think anything is possible?

B. Joey wants to grow up and do something wonderful. List four jobs which let people do wonderful things? What wonderful things do you think you can do when you are grown?

STANDARDS: SS:2; SS:6; G3:5; G2:3; G4:8