

Black Thunder

Chapter Two – by Kay Hively

Joey thought three weeks would never pass. Finally, Tommy graduated from college and came home for a weekend visit. Joey also had finished the school year and was ready for summer.

On Saturday, Joey went fishing with his dad and his brother. Sitting on the creekbank, he listened while his brother talked. Tommy talked about flight school at the Tuskegee Army Air Field. He said this school would let black men become military pilots so they could fight for their country.

Tommy had read about some of the great fighter pilots. He said he could be just as good as them. All he needed was a chance. If he could get through flight school and become a Tuskegee Airman, he would get to show what he could do.

Mr. Cooper said he was proud of Tommy. Joey was proud too, but he worried that his brother might go to war.

Tommy's weekend visit passed quickly and soon it was time for him to go to Alabama. As Tommy packed his suitcase, Joey saw him put in the new camera he had gotten as a graduation present.

Two weeks later, there was a letter in the mailbox from Tommy. Once again, Joey and his mother sat in the swing. Tommy wrote that he was studying hard and not getting much sleep. He said he was in school all day and studied late every night.

In the envelope was a photograph of Tommy in his new army uniform. He was standing beside an airplane. On the back of the picture was written, "To Joey – my little co-pilot. From Tommy."

Joey stared at the photograph for a long time. The man in the picture looked like Tommy, but he sure looked different. Joey decided the uniform made Tommy look like a real man – not just an older brother.

That afternoon, while helping his mother in the garden, Joey kept an eye on the sky. He imagined the sky was full of airplanes, and Tommy was up there in one of them. As he stood watching the

clouds, Joey's mother scolded him for daydreaming, so he bent down and began pulling weeds again.

As he worked in the garden, Joey decided he wanted to learn more about airplanes. He was sure that flying an airplane was more fun than pulling weeds.

That night, Joey put the picture of his brother on the wall beside his bed. As he looked at the picture it seemed to come to life. He could almost see Tommy climbing into the cockpit of an airplane and roaring off into the sky with guns blazing.

Then Joey remembered what was written on the back of the picture. Looking again at the photograph, Joey saw himself in the picture as a co-pilot. He was wearing a helmet and goggles, and sitting in a seat behind Tommy.

But before the two pilots in Joey's imagination could get into a big dogfight, Joey and his imagination had both fallen asleep.



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. Joey has a big imagination. Imagination is like looking into the future. Do you ever imagine things? Imagine what you will do someday. Make a poster to illustrate your imagination. Have a display of all the posters made by you and your classmates.

B. Tommy is going to the Tuskegee Army Air Field in Alabama. On a map, find Tuskegee. Using a road map, decide how far it is from your town to Tuskegee.

Next Week: Chapter Three – Flying High