

HOUSE BILL 697

By DeBerry J

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, relative to designating a portion of I-75 the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail.

WHEREAS, in spite of adversity and limited opportunities, African-Americans have played a significant role in United States military history the past 300 years; and

WHEREAS, the official policy of the military was to deny leadership roles and skilled training to African-American troops because of prejudice and ignorance; and

WHEREAS, before 1940, African-Americans were barred from flying for the United States military; and

WHEREAS, in early 1941, due to tremendous urgings from civil rights organizations and the black press, the Secretary of War approved a plan to establish the "Tuskegee Experiment" which resulted in the formation of the all-African-American 99th Pursuit Squadron located in Tuskegee, Alabama, at the Tuskegee Institute; and

WHEREAS, the cadets who attended the Tuskegee Institute and received their silver wings became known as the Tuskegee Airmen and later became known by the German Air Force as the "Red Tail Devils"; and

WHEREAS, the Tuskegee Airmen consisted not only of pilots but also navigators, bombardiers, maintenance and support staff, instructors, and all personnel who kept their planes in the air; and

WHEREAS, in March 1942, five men received the silver wings of Army Air Force pilots and were the first African-Americans to qualify as military pilots in any branch of the United States Armed Forces; and

WHEREAS, by the end of World War II, almost 1,000 African-Americans had won their silver wings at Tuskegee Army Air Field and almost half of those African-Americans went on to serve our country in the European and Mediterranean wars as combat mission fighter pilots;

and

WHEREAS, the Tuskegee Airmen were responsible for flying more than 15,000 sorties, destroying over 1,000 German aircraft, receiving hundreds of Air Medals and more than 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses and never lost a bomber to enemy air action when flying bomber escort missions; and

WHEREAS, the Tuskegee Airmen overcame segregation and prejudice to become one of the most prestigious, decorated, and respected fighter groups of World War II; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting this general assembly recognize the Tuskegee Airmen's heroic efforts by designating a portion of I-75 the "Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail", now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, the I-75 interstate highway system within the state of Tennessee is designated as the "Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail" as a lasting tribute to these peerless, brave, history-making men.

SECTION 2. The Department of Transportation is directed to erect suitable markers or to affix suitable signs at the first available location at which each interstate highway enters the State of Tennessee designating the I-75 interstate highway system within the state of Tennessee as the "Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail."

SECTION 3. The erection of such signs shall be within the guidelines prescribed by the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

SECTION 4. This act shall become operative only if the federal highway administrator advises the commissioner of transportation in writing that the provisions of this act shall not render Tennessee in violation of federal laws and regulations and subject to penalties prescribed therein.

SECTION 5. This act shall become operative only if the cost of the manufacture and installation of such signs is paid to the department of transportation by the county legislative

body of each county where such signs are installed within one (1) year of the effective date of this act. Such payment shall be made prior to any expenditure by the state for the manufacture or installation of such signs. The department shall return any unused portion of the estimated cost to each county legislative body where such signs are installed within thirty (30) days of the erection of such signs. If the actual cost exceeds the estimated cost, an amount equal to the difference in such costs shall be remitted to the department in non-state funds within thirty (30) days of the county legislative body of the county where such signs are installed receiving an itemized invoice of the actual cost from the department.

SECTION 6. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.