

Collection #  
SC 2696

**JAMES ALLISON:  
FREEMAN FIELD RESEARCH PAPER, 1995**

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27 January 2003

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**COLLECTION INFORMATION**

VOLUME OF  
COLLECTION: 3 folders

COLLECTION  
DATES: 1995

PROVENANCE: James Allison, Bloomington, Indiana, August 2002

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ACCESSION NUMBER: 2002.0730

NOTES:

## HISTORICAL SKETCH

On 5 April 1945 several African-American officers were arrested when against the orders of a white provost marshal, they attempted to enter the officers' club at Freeman Field near Seymour, Indiana. The group was part of the 477<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group that had been transferred from Godman Field near Fort Knox, Kentucky. Prior to Godman, they had been stationed at Selfridge Field, located near Detroit. The Michigan field had a history of racial conflict. In January 1944, several black officers had tried to unsuccessfully enter the base's officer club at Selfridge. Concerned that tensions were high and the area was volatile (Detroit had experienced race riots in June 1943), the Air Force transferred the 477<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group to Godman in 1944. After it was decided that Godman was an unsuitable training facility, the group was relocated to Freeman Field in March 1945.

When the air cleared after the Freeman Field provocation, 101 black officers were arrested. Ultimately they were charged with refusing to sign a directive of Colonel Robert R. Selway, Jr., base commander, that outlined which facilities were designated for whose use on the base. (Along with the officers' club, the tennis courts and swimming pool were off limits to black officers.) Following the 5 April 1945 officers' club incident, they were asked to sign to signify that they had read and fully understood the directive. The officers who became known as the 101 Club were then asked to sign simply indicating that they had read it. They refused both orders. The incident was given much media attention. The black press, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and several politicians lobbied the Department of War on behalf of the African-American officers. Charges were dropped against all officers with the exception of three who were accused of "jostling a post provost marshal." The officers (all classified as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant) were Marsden A. Thompson, Shirley E. Clinton, and Roger C. Terry. Thompson and Clinton were acquitted of all charges during a court martial. Terry was found guilty. In 1995, Terry's conviction in General Court-Martial Number 209, 30 July 1945, was set aside.

Denying the officers access to the club was against AR 210-10, a 1940 army regulation that prohibited the discriminatory use of officer clubs. The Freeman Field incident and subsequent studies by the Air Force and other branches of service looking to improve military efficiency and manpower utilization prepared the road for desegregation. In 1948 President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981 mandating the integration of the armed forces.

Sources:  
Materials in the collection.  
Ray Boomhower, "Nobody Wanted Us: Black Aviators at Freeman Field." *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History*, Summer 1993, p. 38.  
Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., *An Autobiography Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., American*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

“Pilots Defy Segregation at Indiana Camp,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 14 April 1945, p. 1.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection is contained in three file folders. The 199-page manuscript, “Mutiny at Freeman Field: Life and Art of James Gould Cozzens,” written by James Allison in 1995, details a World War II racial episode at Freeman Field in Seymour, Indiana. Against the orders of a white Provost Marshall, African-American Air Force officers attempted to enter the officers’ club. James Gould Cozzens won a Pulitzer Prize for a fictionalized account of the incident when *Guard of Honor* was published in 1948. Allison provides biographical information on Cozzens, background on African-American participation in the armed forces to that period, and a history of the 477<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group and the 332d Fighter Wing. Utilizing the trial transcripts, Allison follows the outcome of the 1945 court martial that results in the conviction of one of the three black soldiers accused during the April 1945 incident at Freeman Field.

The appendix includes a 25-page account of Eugene Jacques Bullard, reputed to be the first and only black combat pilot during World War I. An American, Bullard flew for France. Allison’s biographical sketch is based on P.J. Carisella and James W. Ryan’s 1972 publication, *The Black Swallow of Death: The Incredible Story of Eugene Jacques Bullard, the World’s First Black Combat Aviator*. The sketch closes with a short bibliography and a photocopied photograph of Bullard.

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## CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://157.91.92.2/>
2. Click on the "Traditional Search" icon.
3. Click on the "Call Number" radio button.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, SC 2696).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.