



Galloway students receive sound advice from Merritt

By Meredith C. McGee
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Galloway Elementary School, located on Idlewild Street in Jackson, Mississippi, promoted 33 fifth graders May 25, 2012.

Calla Ridgeway, the only girl out of nine in the Gifted Program, received twelve awards, some of which included The Most Intellectual Girl, Most Books Read During Free Time, and Awesome Artist Award.

Ridgeway, who has cared for and loved pets since she was a toddler, wants to someday become a veterinarian. She has her maternal great uncle James H. Meredith to thank for her career choice. For it was he who broke down barriers nearly 50 years



LaToya Merritt, J.D.

ago in Mississippi which prohibited blacks for studying medical, legal, and other advance degrees at state colleges.

Ridgeway introduced the guest speaker, LaToya Merritt, J.D., a

partner of Phelps & Dunbar LLC., who told the fifth graders, "A lot is expected of you; continue to do your best." She also noted, "Learning is continuous."

Erica Gee-Bradley, the school's principal, provided a message which she called "real talk" to the audience. She admonished parents to embrace the old adage – It takes a village to raise a child; condemning the ideology – You get your child. I'll get mine.

Gee-Bradley said, "I've got to talk to this class a little different from other classes. Looking directly at the fifth grade class she said, "Respect yourselves and respect others. Don't try to grow up too fast. Be a little girl. Be a little boy." She declared, "Girls cover

up! Nobody wants a gift that has already been opened. Young ladies are the queens of the earth. Boys, respect the female. A female brought you into this world." She challenged the students to learn how to wash and iron their clothes, and asked them not to imitate everything they hear celebrities, rappers, and reality television actors say because some of them have been walking around sounding foolish, emulating foolishness.

Gee-Bradley acknowledged the bravery of one fifth grader, Johnnie Smith, who became the Jr. Assistant Principal to help the school enforce disciplinary infractions. Johnnie called meetings to discuss problems

and strategies, and recruited five other fifth graders and assigned them to various hall monitoring duties. Smith and his student team were rewarded monetary and/or other gifts for their service.

The 5th Grade Boys Choir, the 5th Grade Class Choir, and the awardees gave the audience a glimpse of the multiple talents the students' possess. Hopefully this college class of 2019 will take heed to the "real talk" presented by Gee-Bradley, and remember the words of Merritt, "Your success won't be easy, but it will be worth the effort and hard work you put into it."

Ridgeway, the Valedictorian of her class, is spending the summer

with her father Calvin Ridgeway in Georgia. Her mother, Willa Ridgeway, was a former JPS substitute teacher. Her grandmother, a major figure in her life, Hazel Janell Meredith, known as Hazel Hall, is the author of *My Brother J-Boy* and the co-author of *A Story About James Meredith*, which are children books on James H. Meredith (www.heirsskymall.com).

The school's theme, "Success is failure turned inside out," is a reminder to the children to stay in the race. Johnnie Smith, who stopped violating school rules and became a force to be reckoned with as a Jr. Assistant Principal and Hall Monitor, is an example of progress – real talk.

G.V. Sonny Montgomery honors Tuskegee Airmen Calvin Moret and James H. Harvey III

By Artaymis Ma'at
Jackson Advocate Contributing Writer

The G.V. Sonny Montgomery Veterans Administration in Jackson, MS, recently honored two great countrymen – Tuskegee Airmen Calvin Moret and James H. Harvey III – both decorated for their military service during World War II.

What do you know about the Tuskegee Airmen? Why were they called the Tuskegee Airmen? How much do you know about their journey? Why were they called "Red Tails"? Did you know that the Tuskegee Airmen were the first African American military aviators in the United States armed forces during World War II to fly combat missions? It is astonishing that all African American pilots trained at Tuskegee. Are you surprised to know that the Tuskegee Airmen included pilots, navigators, bombardiers, maintenance and support staff, instructors, and all the personnel who kept the planes in the air?

Air Corps officials built a separate facility at Tuskegee Army Air Field to train the pilots. The classrooms where they trained were overcrowded and many of the instructors did not want to train them. They were forced to train in segregated units. The pilots experienced and suffered many hardships from the racist attitudes of many military officials and outside of the military realm. But the Tuskegee Airman proved themselves to be world class individuals and pilots. They did what many said could not be done. They made a way out of no way. Just think of how much more the airmen could have achieved if they did not have to not only try to do 150% of what was required but fight against their own fellowman – their white counterparts. Just think of how many lives could have been saved!

The most famous of the Tuskegee Airmen, the 332nd Fighter Group, earned the nickname "Red Tail Angels" because of the distinctive red paint on the propeller and tail of their planes. The bombers called the airmen their escorts "angels". What comes to mind when you think of "Top Gun"? In reality, it was a Tuskegee Airman who took part and won the U.S. Armed Forces first "Top Gun" competition. According to record, there were 996 original Airmen. Did you know that 33 Tuskegee Airmen were prisoners of war?

What is even more fascinating and awesome is the fact that they flew over an estimated 700 bomber escort missions. White American pilots were not allowed

to fly more than 52 missions. They destroyed 251 enemy aircraft. When the war ended they were the only fighter group to never lose an escorted bomber to enemy fighters. Regardless of the 899 medals they obtained, they too experienced the tension of Jim Crow. Yes, throughout it all, racism, segregation and discrimination was still at the forefront. This was no surprise that many whites did not believe they were capable to fight in combat situations. Time and time again, they proved that they were elite – supreme, but were denied leadership roles and skilled training. Plain and simple, they were barred from flying.

Proudly the Black Press and prominent organizations exerted pressure that resulted in the formation of an all African American pursuit squadron based in Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1941. Important to note is the Airmen played a crucial role in the African American war for "Double Victory" – victory over the Axis powers and victory over racism at home. They were also pioneers in breaking down racial barriers such as equality and integration.

Lt. Col. James H. Harvey exclaims, "I just wanted to learn to fly. I tried to enlist but they said they weren't taking any enlistments. I knew that was wrong, so I got drafted. After being denied an enlistment in the Army Air Corps for cadet pilot training, I was drafted into the Army in 1943 and boarded a train for Fort Meade, Md., where I took the physical and written examinations. If you passed the written and physical exams you were in. I passed with flying colors and off to Tuskegee Army Air Field I went (to attend pilot training school). [Would you believe that Harvey was assigned to be a bulldozer operator clearing areas for air fields?] "I decided this was not for me, so I applied for cadet training. This is where you learn how to fly. There were 10 of us taking the examination, nine whites and myself, and only I and one White passed the examination to attend Pilot Training School.

"After we as cadets passed the primary flight training at Moton Field, we were transferred to Tuskegee Army Airfield (TAAF) for the advanced training with the Army Air Corps. TAAF was a full-scale military base (albeit segregated) built by the U.S. military. Our instructors were white and they weren't too happy about training us. It was no secret that they hated Negroes, but they trained us because that was their jobs. The instructor would demonstrate a maneuver. You had to duplicate the



Alcorn State Cadet Keturah Richardson (center) with Tuskegee Airmen LTC (ret.) James Harvey III (left) and Calvin Moret. Both men were trained to fly at the now famous Tuskegee Army Air Field in Tuskegee, Alabama. Richardson led a team of cadets who presented the airmen a plaque on behalf of the G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center. She also is a future aviator having been assigned to the Aviation branch of the United States Army. She is to fly helicopters.

maneuver or you were out.

"Tuskegee, Alabama, was the worst place in the country for Negroes. It was a sport to the white people to find a Negro out on the town. They beat us, castrated us, hung us and tortured us for fun. The way to overcome that was to stay on the post. So we did.

"At present day, I think things are going fairly well with President Obama in office. He is doing fine. The economy is growing. But we still need unity. The republicans don't agree. False information goes out and people start believing the false information. There is only so much he can do and it's being rejected.

"Word to the youth: Stay in school. Get your education. It's like having your bags packed so when the door of opportunity opens you can step through to your future."

Although Harvey did not fly combat missions during WWII, he fought in Korea in 1950-1951. He earned the Distinguished Flying Cross and ten Air Medals. "I remember by December 1950, the Air Corps announced that a pilot's combat limit was 100 missions," said LTC (ret.) Harvey. "I already had 126. They didn't let me fly anymore. For more information visit my website Tuskegeetopgun.com or my facebook page."

Another famed Tuskegee Airman, Calvin Moret, has keys to the city of New Orleans! Moret was presented with a replica of the planes he flew in World War II. The New Orleans Saints also

signed a football in his honor. "You have blessed us with your courage and your tenacity," said Mayor Landrieu. You've been an ambassador for the city of New Orleans."

Moret said there is a lot that isn't in the history books that needs to be told. For example, something as simple as the fact he would have to be able to identify enemy aircraft and allied aircraft within a tenth of a second while in the air, or the fact that "66 Black American pilots died over Europe defending the bombers they were assigned to."

The nation easily agrees with him when he says, "We were the cream of the crop. We were highly trained. We were highly skilled. The bombers got shot down because of the German fighters. Sure enough, it was the nation's loss when they did not allow us to go there. I have often given talks relative to that. Segregation and discrimination was the problem for that. Sixty planes didn't come back because they got shot down by the Germans. Understand. These are the facts and it was all caused by racism.

"We destroyed locomotives and such but because of our color we could not protect the bombers. It was not until the later stages of war that we were ordered to protect the bombers. The records show that we did an excellent job of protecting those bombers. I was good enough to be able to fly those airplanes and sacrifice my life, but yet again I was not good enough to be in a class of some white guys.

What does that say for us as a nation? It says we don't practice what we preach – you know...the freedom for all and such? It was a great obstacle for many of us.

"The Civil Rights Movement came after the war. The men that had gone overseas had risked their lives and were not permitted to vote. This contributed to that movement. By not being allowed to vote, we were nothing. Understand? Just consider this. Many of us didn't get an education because of the obstacles that were put in front of us. When a guy isn't educated, he can't perform as well. He then becomes a negative force on the nation."

Moret thinks President Obama is doing a good job under the circumstances. "I think he has done a very good job. There are people who say, 'I don't have a job!' but is it his sole responsibility to give everyone a job? You know? Can he reach in his pocket and give everyone a job? The answer to that is obvious. WE, the people create these kinds of situations with supply and demand. When we demand a particular product, we need someone to produce it. I firmly believe that many of the wars that take place are funded through agencies of our government. I was reading the other day that Eastman Kodak is on the verge of bankruptcy. Is it the president's job to hire all those people who are about to be laid off? What we need in this country is balance. We need to level the playing field so that we can all be out there pushing the

wheel vice being dragged or pulled. It's going to take some will and self-determination. Help others along your journey."

Being a native of Detroit, Moret says he's proud of the fact that the late Mayor Coleman Young served in the 477th Medium-Bomber Group (Tuskegee Airmen) of the United States Army Air Forces as a bombardier and navigator. He was also born in Alabama. He worked for Ford Motor Company, during the second World War. As a lieutenant in the 477th, he played a role in the Freeman Field Mutiny in which 162 African American officers were arrested for resisting segregation at a base near Seymour, Indiana, in 1945. He protested segregation in the Army and racial discrimination in the UAW. He served five terms as Mayor of Detroit. "Woo-hooo!" Moret yelled.

And now for the quick history facts: "The Tuskegee Airmen managed to destroy or damage over 409 German airplanes, 950 ground units, and sank a battleship destroyer. They ran more than 200 bomber escort missions during World War II. On Nov. 6, 1998, President Clinton approved Public Law 105-355, which established the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site at Moton Field in Tuskegee, Ala., to commemorate and interpret the heroic actions of the Tuskegee Airmen during World War II. When the site opened Oct. 10, 2008, at Moton Field, Ala., National Park Officials designated part of Interstate 85, which passes near the city of Tuskegee, as the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Highway.

The G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center will conduct a free health fair clinic on Thursday, May 31, 2012, from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. This event will target all Veterans that are not currently enrolled for health care at the medical center. The event will be held in the Jackson VA Atrium and adjoining Primary Care Clinic areas. For more information, call 601-362-4471 x1232.