

2023 Governor's Award for Historic Preservation



Lake Huron Red Tail Aircraft

Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Maritime Archaeology Program; Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Law Enforcement Division Great Lakes Enforcement Unit; Michigan State Police, Marine Services Team; Tuskegee Airmen National Museum; Noble Odyssey Foundation; David Losinski; and Drew Losinski

Documentation and recovery of the P-39Q Red Tail aircraft in lower Lake Huron, Saint Clair County

The Tuskegee Airmen were America's first Black military airmen, serving bravely during World War II. Many graduates of the Tuskegee pilot training program came to Michigan for additional training before deployment. In April 1944, a Bell P-39Q Airacobra "Red Tail" airplane, flown by 22-year-old Tuskegee Airman Lt. Frank H. Moody, crashed in Lake Huron on a training exercise. Moody's body was quickly recovered, but the aircraft was not found.

In 2014 the wreckage was discovered by divers David and Drew Losinski. They contacted State Maritime Archaeologist Wayne Lusardi, who began leading volunteer expeditions to document the site the next year. The wreckage is located at a depth of 30 feet scattered across nearly 10 acres of lake bottom.

Although disarticulated, many of the Airacobra components remain intact including the wings, engine, three propeller blades, tail, cabin doors, and some armament. The initial efforts captured high definition underwater photography and mapped the wreckage on the bottom of the lake.

The Tuskegee Airmen National Museum received a state permit to recover the aircraft starting in 2018, and all of the wreckage will be mapped, recovered, conserved, and placed on exhibit in Detroit. Documentation of the plane has led to new recognition for the Tuskegee Airmen, and to the creation of a special memorial to honor Lt. Moody in 2021. Once fully conserved, artifacts recovered from the wreck will illustrate the significance of the site and its history for decades to come.

