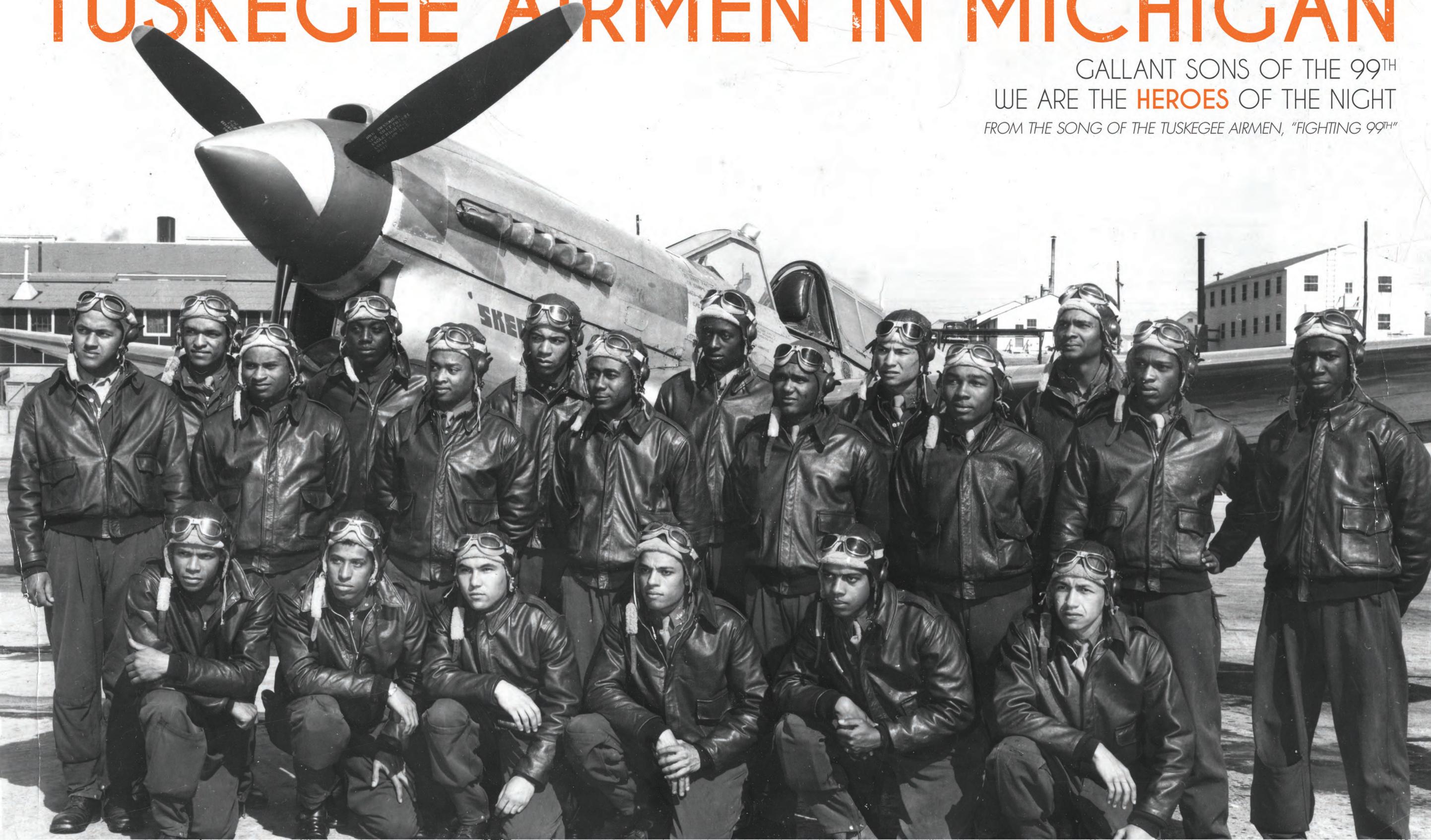


MICHIGAN MARITIME ARCHAEOLOGY 2017

# TUSKEGEE ARMEN IN MICHIGAN

GALLANT SONS OF THE 99<sup>TH</sup>  
WE ARE THE **HEROES** OF THE NIGHT  
*FROM THE SONG OF THE TUSKEGEE ARMEN, "FIGHTING 99<sup>TH</sup>"*

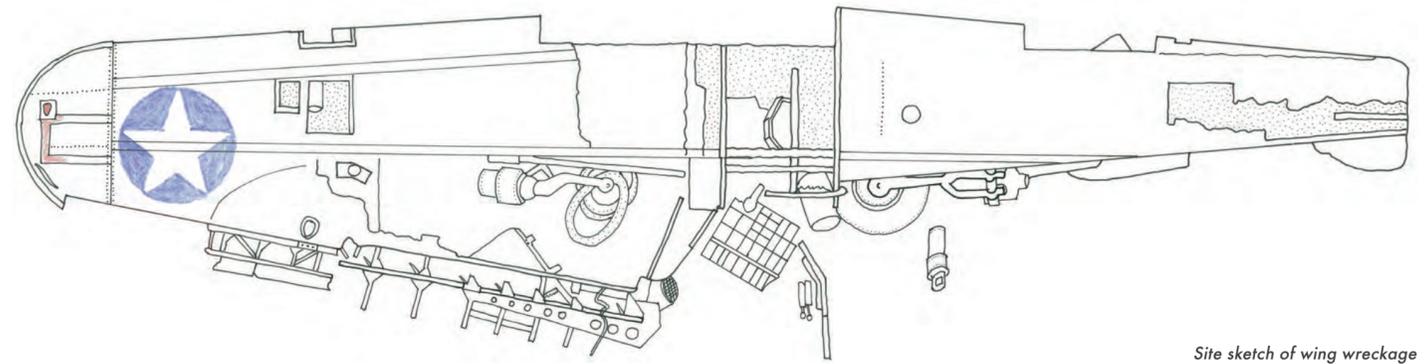


**LT. FRANK MOODY** was a Tuskegee Airman and part of the 553<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Squadron stationed at Selfridge Field during World War II. Lt. Moody's **P-39Q AIRACOBRA** crashed into Lake Huron during a training exercise on April 11, 1944.

Photo: Tuskegee Class SE-44-B, courtesy of the Air Force Historical Research Agency  
Printed by the State Historic Preservation Office of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority

# TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

The Tuskegee Airmen were America's **FIRST BLACK** military airmen. Despite facing racism in a racially segregated military, they enlisted and were trained initially as **SINGLE-ENGINE PILOTS** and later as either twin-engine pilots, navigators or bombardiers. Many trained in operations, meteorology, intelligence, engineering, medicine or any of the other officer fields, while others were aircraft and engine mechanics, armament specialists, radio repairmen, parachute riggers, control tower operators, policemen, administrative clerks and many other professions necessary for a fully functioning **ARMY AIR CORP** flying squadron or ground support unit. Many of the Tuskegee Airmen served in either the 99<sup>th</sup> Pursuit (later Fighter) Squadron, before being transferred to the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group in the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force.

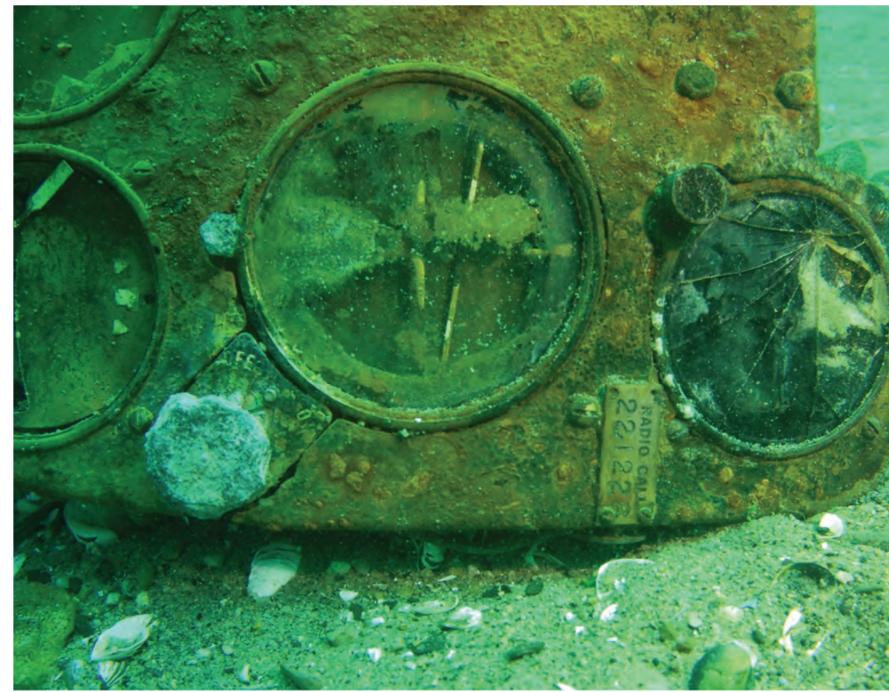


Site sketch of wing wreckage

## THE AIRMEN IN MICHIGAN

Many graduates of the Tuskegee pilot training program in Alabama came to Michigan for additional training to gain experience in an area with weather and geographical conditions similar to those that pilots might encounter in Europe. The 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group and many more Army Air Force units, trained at **SELFRIDGE AIR FORCE BASE** near Mt. Clemens on Lake St. Clair and at Camp Skeel on the shores of Lake Huron in Oscoda. Upon completion of training in Michigan, many Tuskegee airmen were immediately deployed to combat support missions in Italy, North Africa and the Mediterranean.

One of the primary aircrafts used by the Tuskegee over Lake Huron was the **P-39Q AIRACOBRA**, which measured 30 feet 2 inches in length, 12 feet 5 inches in height, and had a wingspan of 34 feet. The single-seat airplane had a range of 650 miles, could reach speeds of 385 mph at 11,000 feet and could climb to 35,000 feet. The Airacobra was armed with a **37MM CANNON** that fired through the propeller hub, two .50-cal machine guns in the forward fuselage and two .50-cal machine guns located in pods, one under each wing.



P-39Q instrument panel

## LT. FRANK MOODY

Frank H. Moody graduated in Class SE-44-B at Tuskegee on February 8, 1944. He was commissioned a **2<sup>ND</sup> LIEUTENANT** in the US Army Air Corps and was part of the 553<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Squadron based at Selfridge Field. The 553<sup>rd</sup> provided replacement pilots for the 332<sup>nd</sup> in the European Theater of Operation. On April 11, 1944, Moody's Bell P-39Q Airacobra **CRASHED** into Lake Huron seven miles north of Port Huron. Lt. Moody and three other pilots were conducting gunnery exercises 100 feet above **LAKE HURON** when his plane gave off a trail of black smoke, raised its nose slightly, then cart-wheeled into the water. Lt. Moody died immediately. His body was recovered soon after, but the plane was not found until years later.



## P-39Q AIRACOBRA DISCOVERY

David Losinski, a helicopter pilot with the Oakland County Sheriff's Department and his son, Drew, discovered a Bell P-39Q Airacobra on April 11, 2014, exactly **70 YEARS** to the day after Lt. Moody's crash. Recognizing the aircraft door on the lake bottom, David notified Wayne Lusardi, the Department of Natural Resource's state maritime archaeologist at Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, and began documenting the site.

In 2015 a team of professional and avocational **ARCHAEOLOGISTS** visited the wreck to document the remains of the aircraft. Team members included (pictured at left, left to right) the principal investigator, State Maritime Archaeologist Wayne R. Lusardi; Diving with a Purpose volunteer Erik C. Denson; NOAA archaeologist Stephanie Gandulla; and Diving with a Purpose volunteers Kamau Sadiki, Melody Garrett, Jay Haigler and Ernie Franklin. Ernie Franklin's Detroit high school math teacher, Richard Macon, graduated from Tuskegee with Lt. Moody.



History compiled from the research of Wayne Lusardi and the Tuskegee Airmen National Historical Museum, Detroit.

Top right: Site sketch of wing wreckage by Wayne Lusardi, courtesy of Wayne Lusardi. Middle: P-39Q instrument panel on lake bottom, courtesy of Wayne Lusardi. Bottom left: Investigative team by M. Householder, courtesy of M. Householder.