

"This is Calhoun 88! Calhoun 88 calling anyone that can hear me. Over! This is Calhoun 88. We're in real trouble! Over!" He waits a long few seconds for someone to answer. Nothing but silence. He tries again. And again. Corporal Clarence Causey, Jr. calls, "They're swinging around, skipper, still looking us over," Corporal Carlton Pinnegar says, "Maybe they're new and don't know what their doing."

Pollard thinks to himself, 'Maybe they're pros and are taking their time to determine if any of our gunners are knocked out. They want to come in on a dead gunner.' Jim Smith adds, "I hope to hell they think the radar antennas sticking out of the ball turret are guns. We're naked below."

Amos tries the fighter frequency again. "This is Calhoun 88 in big trouble. Anybody out there?" He thinks it's hopeless, but he keeps calling to give his crew hope. Suddenly a deep, resonant voice booms out, "Calhoun 88, where are you?"

Amos knows his own slow drawl marks him to any listener as a white Southerner. And he knows unmistakably that the voice he hears is that of another Southerner, one of a different color.

"This is Calhoun 88! We're clearing the mountains about fifty miles north of the coast! Altitude 11,000 ft, descending. We're crippled and have two Me 109's closing in on us. Can you help?" "Looks like you got yourself in a pack a trouble, Calhoun. Just where did you boys come up with a call sign like Calhoun anyway?"

Something catches the corner of Pollard's left eye, a tiny speck rapidly growing in size! A moment or two later he looks out his side window and watches a P-51 mustang slide right up on his left wing. The pilot takes off his oxygen mask and grins at Amos with the whitest teeth he ever saw. A moment later a second mustang, his wingman joins the first. The lead black pilot gives Amos a salute and is gone as fast as he arrived.

"You boys head on home, now! We gonna' take care of Fritz." The tails of the two mustangs are painted bright red. Amos has heard of them, the Tuskegee fliers They're based at Manfredonia on the spur of Italy. He doesn't know where they came from. Maybe they were on a fighter sweep over Udine, or maybe they just finished an escort mission. Pollard doesn't care. He's so damn glad to see them he could kiss 'em. The German hunters quickly become the hunted.

Back at Torretta, Pollard's ground crew stands alone out on the field, waiting. Hope is waning when someone shouts, "Look there! Low on the horizon! Others strain to see a tiny speck coming their way! "That's gotta' be Calhoun 88!" Bomber crews pour

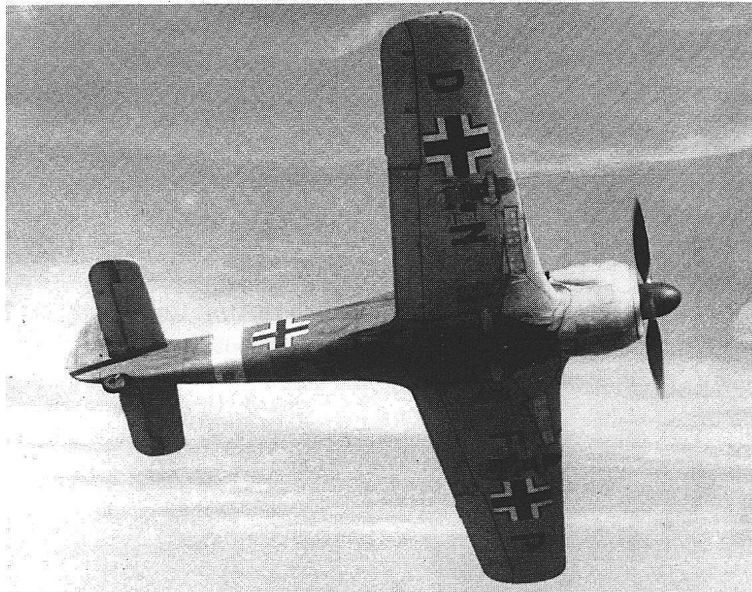
out of tents and shacks to welcome home one of their own returning from the lost. They watch Captain Amos S Pollard bring in his crippled plane.

Within a couple of days Captain Pollard and his crew will go out and do it all over again. Before it is over, they will have flown and survived thirty four combat missions.

### Epilogue

The 484th Bomb Group began operations in Italy in April of 1944 with four squadrons and a total strength of sixty one aircraft. The war ended a year later. During that time, it took a total of 118 replacement aircraft to keep them at full strength. Captain Amos S Pollard survived the war. So did every member of his crew. He's proud of that fact. Others were not so fortunate. In its year of operations out of Torretta, 484th air crew losses to enemy action (killed, wounded or missing in action) totaled sixty six crews, six hundred and sixty men , over 100 percent of its original strength.

Of all the missions Amos Pollard flew, the one described above stood out most in his memory. He came from a rural community in Choctaw County, Mississippi near the small town of Mathiston. He had grown up in a segregated South, was serving in a segregated Army Air Force and had never thought much about it. Then, high in a lonely, hostile sky, two black men saved his life and the lives of his crew at great risk to themselves. For Amos, it changed a whole way of thinking. "I'll for-



An FW-190

ever be grateful to those Red Tail pilots. I deeply regret that I never was able to find out who they were to thank them personally. As their reputation grew, bomber pilots began asking specifically for the Red Tails to escort them. I was one of them."

After the war Pollard and his copilot, Jim Smith, stayed in touch and occasionally got together. More than fifty years later, while Pollard was visiting Smith at his home on the coast of Maine, the two took a rowing dory across a small inlet. While they were rowing, James Smith paused and said, "Amos, there's something I always wanted to say to you and just never got around to it. I figure we won't live forever so I might as well tell you now." Amos kept rowing. Smith said, "I just want to tell you that I thought you exhibited one hell of a lot of personal courage back when we flew those missions together.

Amos stopped rowing, looked at his friend and replied, "Hell Jim, don't you know I was scared to death!" "I didn't back then," Smith said, "You set an example of courage for me and the crew. I just wanted you to know. Now get back to your oars before we drift out to sea!"