



Alabama Public Television Education

Dear Mr. President



Caption: Mildred Hemmons Carter as a young woman in the CPTP

Before the United States entered World War II, the country began to train pilots to prepare for possible participation in the war. At Tuskegee Institute, now Tuskegee University, a short-lived initiative to teach undergraduate African Americans to become civilian pilots was started. It was named the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP).

Ms. Hemmons, a seventeen-year-old student, worked in the office that handled the CPTP applications. She watched young men sign up for the training and decided that she could participate, too. She was successful and got her pilot's license in 1941. At that time there were only about a hundred African American licensed pilots in the United States and there were only a few African American women. She was the first female pilot in

Alabama, A few months after obtaining her license, the country decided that only male pilots could be a part of the CPTP.

In 1941, Ms. Hemmons was flying over Kennedy Field, a civilian air strip where CPTP students were being trained, when an important visitor, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, came to visit. Mrs. Roosevelt was there to see the African American men who were flying when she discovered that there were African American women who were also in the air. Mrs. Roosevelt returned to Washington, D.C., to report her findings to President Roosevelt. Her report, along with the efforts of others, helped to persuade the president to allow African American pilots to be considered for combat. However, Ms. Hemmons was still denied the opportunity to fly because she was a female.

As disappointing as it was to be denied the opportunity to serve as a pilot, Ms. Hemmons was the first civilian hired for the Tuskegee Air project. Her first job was to bulldoze trees to make way for the airfield. She, along with many others who worked at support jobs, contributed to the success of the Tuskegee Airmen through her work. She applied to become a WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilot). The WASPs were responsible for ferrying planes from factories to airfields. However, her application was denied because she was African American.

At Tuskegee, Ms. Hemmons met her future husband, Herbert Carter, who went through CPTP training before joining the Army Air Corps and becoming a member of the 99<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron, better known as the Tuskegee Airmen.

Although Herbert Carter was confined to the Tuskegee Army Airfield during training, he would telephone Mildred to let her know when he would be flying. She would race to Kennedy Field and board her Piper Cub to meet him in the air when he was flying his AT-6. It is reported that they waved to each other and blew kisses to each other while flying over Lake Martin. They were married in 1942 at the Tuskegee Army Airfield chapel. While he was overseas, Mildred Hemmons Carter, like many others, was a member of the Tuskegee Airmen support staff and worked tirelessly at Moton Field and at the Tuskegee Army Airfield as a clerk.

## Works Cited

- “Mildred Carter: Tuskegee Airwoman.” *Alabama Heritage*,  
[www.alabamaheritage.com/from-the-vault/mildred-carter-tuskegee-airwoman](http://www.alabamaheritage.com/from-the-vault/mildred-carter-tuskegee-airwoman).
- Museum, About the Author: Tuskegee, et al. “Tuskegee Air(Wo)Men Profiles: Mildred L. Hemmons-Carter.” *The Tuskegee Airmen National Historical Museum*, 18 June 2021,  
[www.tuskegeemuseum.org/tuskegee-airwomen-profile-mildred-l-hemmons-carter/](http://www.tuskegeemuseum.org/tuskegee-airwomen-profile-mildred-l-hemmons-carter/).

## “Dear Mr. President” Activity

### Directions

- Read the passage above about Mildred Hemmons Carter.
- After reading the article, compose a friendly letter as if you were Mildred Hemmons Carter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt to persuade him to allow African American women to participate in the WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots) program.
- Remember to use the appropriate elements, including date, greeting, body, and a signature.
- The year of your letter will be 1941.