

**Andrew Maples, Jr.
Tuskegee Airman from Orange**



Captain Andrew Maples, Jr.

From Historian Frank S. Walker in his book, *Remembering*¹:

“In the 1930s, Andrew Maples, Sr., lived in a small frame house in the shadow of St. Thomas’ Episcopal Church in Orange. Maples sold insurance in the local black community for the Home Beneficial Life Insurance Company and did various other jobs to help make ends meet. For example, when Mrs. Scott had a big occasion at Montpelier, she would ask Maples to help.

“Maples’ occupations and experiences, however, went beyond the norm. A New York native, he had served as a member of the 92nd Division of the Allied Expeditionary Forces during World War I. He had been gassed, and doctors told him that his injured lungs couldn’t handle the New York City air. But love was already providing an answer: He was going to marry Julia Blanche Michie and move to her home town of Orange, Virginia.

“Julia Michie had also seen more of the world than Orange County and Virginia. She had lived and worked in Philadelphia for a time before moving to New York. Both Andrew Maples and his new bride understood what black people could do if they got a good education and operated in an environment that afforded more opportunities than the Jim Crow South of their day. In 1920, the Maples had their first child, and named him Andrew Maples, Jr.

¹ Frank S. Walker, Jr., *Remembering: A History of Orange County, Virginia* (Orange, Virginia: Orange County Historical Society, 2004), 209-212.

“Andrew Maples, Jr., spent his early years in Orange and attended the local segregated elementary school. He was evidently a bright youngster, and he was doubtless strongly encouraged by his parents to learn. As his education progressed towards the high school level, the decision was made for him to move to Washington DC, live with a relative, and attend Armstrong High School. At the time in Orange County, Lightfoot School in Unionville was reported to be offering a certificate program to black students which was supposed to be the equivalent of a high school education, but Armstrong offered the environment and education that Maples, Sr., felt would best fit his son for the future.

“Upon the completion of his high school education, Andrew was accepted at Hampton Institute in eastern Virginia. The Second World War was beginning as his Hampton years started, and somewhere, somehow, Andrew learned to fly airplanes....In any event, with the war raging in Europe, Andrew withdrew from Hampton at the end of his sophomore year and entered the Flying School at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

“The prestigious Tuskegee Institute, long known as the excellent black college whose programs had been initially developed and administered by Booker T. Washington, had applied to the federal government to become a flying school for black pilots. The school was approved conditionally, and in July 1941, thirteen pilot cadets began training. Nine months later, five graduated. The Army Air Corps was satisfied and authorized the school to continue. College students all over America were entering flying schools and being hit with cram courses in math, applied mechanics, meteorology, navigation, and aeronautics. The physical training and flying instruction was just as intense. The ‘wash-out’ and resignation rate was high everywhere, but no higher than Tuskegee. In the pilots it graduated, Tuskegee was going to show America something.

“...The Army Air Corps wanted Tuskegee’s pilots, with one possible exception: Andrew. Fighter plane cockpits were designed with no excess room, and the design contemplated an average sized body. Andrew was definitely not average-sized; he was tall and lanky. Robert Eason, who also flew fighter planes in WWII and who has the same type of frame, says that he had to figure out a way to fold himself into an airplane and then convince everyone that he was comfortable, which he wasn’t. Andrew no doubt had to do the same.

“On January 14, 1942, the Tuskegee Flying School honored its largest graduating class to date. Andrew Maples, Jr., was one of the 43 graduates and along with his diploma, he received his pilot’s wings and a Second Lieutenant’s commission in the Army Air Corps. He thus became one of the “Tuskegee Airmen,” the famed black fighter pilots of WWII. The Airmen began overseas operations in Africa and later moved to Italy. The 99th Fighter Squadron was joined over time by the 100th, the 301st, and the 302nd squadrons, all Tuskegee Airmen. The four squadrons were incorporated into the 332nd Fighter Group, flying bomber escort missions deep into enemy territory. In 1945, some of the group actually tangled with German Me-262 jet fighter planes, but they kept intact a phenomenal record of never losing a bomber placed under their protection.

“Andrew went to Michigan for advanced training. While there, he demonstrated a proficiency which earned him a promotion to First Lieutenant. He soon went overseas as a member of the 301st Fighter Squadron. By 1944, Andrew’s command was flying the new P-47 Thunderbolts;, planes combining a long range with more than adequate speed and firepower. On June 26, 1944, he was a member of the escort for a deep penetration bombing mission into Hungary. On the way home, Andrew ran into trouble.

“At about 5:15 p.m., he radioed his base that the plane’s engine had quit and that he was going to have to bail out. His last reported position was at 3,000 feet over the Adriatic Sea, some ten miles north of Termoli, Italy. Andrew radioed that he could just barely make out the Italian coast--and then he was gone. Two planes took off from Andrew’s base and flew a search pattern over the reported bail-out area. Seeing nothing, they extended the pattern all the way to the coast of Yugoslavia, then came back to repeat it in the bail-out area. Nothing.

“The Maples family was notified that Lieutenant Maples was missing, and the war went on. The family, with five sons in the military by that time, waited anxiously for news. None came for a long time, and when news finally came, it was bad. On June 27, 1945, the War Department notified the Maples family that a year had elapsed with no evidence that Andrew was alive. He was accordingly being declared killed in action on June 26, 1944. The family was devastated.

“First Lieutenant Andrew Maples, Jr., was posthumously promoted to Captain, and Mr. and Mrs. Maples were awarded the Gold Star, symbolic of the loss of a child in the war. After the war, the local segregated Veterans of Foreign Wars post asked the Maples family for permission to name their post in his honor. Permission granted. Still later, a monument honoring Virginia’s airmen killed in WWII was dedicated at Richmond. Andrew’s name is on it.

“The name of Andrew Maples, Jr., has, unfortunately, been forgotten by a large number of Orange County residents....It should not be. He was, and is, a hero, a black American hero--from Orange County, Virginia.”

(Frank Walker indicated that he was indebted to Doris J. Maples Walker and other members of her family for their help in bringing back the memory of her brother.)

Additional Information:

From the website: "Together We Served"²website

**Maples, Andrew, Jr., Captain
Fallen**

Service Years: 1942-44

Military Occupation Specialty code (MOS): MOS-1055 Pilot, Single Engine Fighter

Last Address: Ramitelli Airfield, Foggia, Italy

Causality Date: June 26, 1944

Cause: Non-Hostile, Died while missing (Air Loss, Crash at Sea)

Location of Internment: American Cemetery, Florence, Italy³

Soon after leaving base on a bomber escort mission to Hungary, his engine quit and he said he was going to bail out. His P-47 was seen to crash into the sea, but no trace of him was found. He is memorialized in Florence. He was posthumously awarded the rank of captain.

1942-43: AAF MOS-5770, Aviator Cadet Flight School

1943-44: AAF MOS-1055, 301st Fighter Squadron

1943-44: AAF MOS-1055, 332nd Fighter Group

Combat Operations: 1944-45 World War II, European-African Middle Eastern Theater/Anzio Campaign 1944

From the website: "American Air Museum in Britain"⁴

Ramitelli airfield was a temporary airfield southeast of Campomarino in the north of Apulia, Italy. The airfield was built by the United States Army Corps of Engineers in early 1944, as part of the Foggia Airfield Complex, a series of World War II military airfields located within a 25 mile (40 km) radius of Foggia. It had a single runway and made use of farmhouses around the airfield as operations buildings. It became the home base for the Fifteenth Air Forces 332nd Fighter Group, the 'Tuskegee Airmen'. They used the airfield until the end of the war, and served with distinction in their red tailed P-47 Thunderbolts and P-51 Mustangs. After 15 May 1945 the

²<https://airforce.togetherweserved.com/usaf/servlet/tws.webapp.WebApp?cmd=ShadowBoxProfile&type=Person&ID=172418>

³ Maples was not interred but memorialized on *Tablets of the Missing* at the American Cemetery.
<https://www.abmc.gov/decedent-search/maples%3Dandrew>

⁴ <http://www.americanairmuseum.com/place/169427>

airfield was used by 523rd Air Service Group and 949 Air Engineering Squadron. It closed in Oct 1945, after which it was dismantled.



P-47 Red Tail Thunderbolt of the 332nd Fighter Group “Tuskegee Airmen”, Ramitelli Airfield, Italy, 1944⁵

⁵ <https://www.aviationgraphic.com/aviation-lithographs/314-p-47d-thunderbolt-39-red-tails-gm-56.html>

Andrew Maples, Jr., Historical Marker is located close to his Orange home. The marker is situated near the intersection of Madison Road and Caroline Street.

