



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Roy J. McDonald

## Clarence Dart

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Lt. Col

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**Award:** Veterans' Hall of Fame

**Year:** 2011

Squadron "F" 318th Army Air Force Base Unit

As a member of the famed World War II Tuskegee Airmen, Clarence Dart not only fought valiantly for his country overseas, he fought racism at home. Named after their training site in Alabama, the Tuskegee Airmen were the first African-Americans to fly as fighter-pilots in the United States military. As Dart recalls, "Someone in the War Department believed that the cranial capacity of blacks wouldn't let them fly. We proved them wrong!" Indeed, they did: the Tuskegee Airmen did not lose a single escorted bomber to the Germans. Their heroism during World War II was a key reason why President Truman desegregated the armed forces soon after the end of the war.

Dart's early missions were in support of General Mark W. Clark's 5<sup>th</sup> Army as they drove to Rome. Dart was constantly flying dive bombing and strafing missions and was shot down twice. After Gen. Clark liberated Rome, the Tuskegee Airmen switched roles and became bomber escorts. In all, Dart flew 95 missions: 45 missions for the 12<sup>th</sup> Air Force in P-40s and 50 for the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force in P-51s. For his bravery, Dart was awarded five Distinguished Flying Crosses, an Air Medal, a

Victory Medal, and the WWII Victory Medal.

After the war, Dart ended up back in Tuskegee, AL, training pilots, and then went to school in Oakland, CA, to study aeronautics. A native of Elmira, Dart settled in Saratoga Springs and worked for General Electric Company until his retirement. Married for 61 years to Mildred Dart, he is the father of seven daughters and two sons.

As a Tuskegee Airmen, Dart ascended to the rank of Captain. When he returned to New York after the war, Dart continued his service as a Reservist with the New York Air National Guard and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel.