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Do you know who this is a photo of? Chances are you don't, but don't feel bad because probably not one American in one million does, and that is a National tragedy. His name is Eugene Jacques Bullard, and he is the first African-American fighter pilot in history. But he is also much more than that: He's also a national hero, and his story is so incredible that I bet if you wrote a movie script based on it Hollywood would reject it as being too far-fetched.

Bullard was an expat living in France, and when World War 1 broke out he joined the French Infantry. He was seriously wounded, and France awarded him the Croix de Guerre and Medaille Militaire. In 1916 he joined the French air service and he first trained as a gunner but later he trained as a pilot. When American pilots volunteered to help France and formed the famous Lafayette Escadrille, he asked to join but by the time he became a qualified pilot they were no longer accepting new recruits, so he joined the Lafayette

When the United States finally joined the war, Bullard was the only member of the Escadrille or the French Flying Corps who was NOT invited to join the US Air Service. The reason? At that time the Air Service only accepted white men.

Now here is the part that almost sounds like a sequel to 'Casablanca': After WWI Bullard became a jazz musician in Paris and he eventually owned a nightclub called 'L'Escadrille'. When the Germans invaded France and conquered it in WW2, his Club, and Bullard, became hugely popular with German officers, but what they DIDN'T know was that Bullard, who spoke fluent German, was actually working for the Free French as a spy. He eventually joined a French infantry unit, but he was badly wounded and had to leave the service.

By the end of the war, Bullard had become a national hero in France, but he later moved back to the U.S. where he was of course completely unknown. Practically no one in the United States was aware of it when, in 1959, the French government named him a national Chevalier, or Knight.

In 1960, the President of France, Charles DeGaulle, paid a state visit to the United States and when he arrived he said that one of the first things he wanted to do was to meet Bullard. That sent the White House staff scrambling because most of them, of course, had never even heard of him. They finally located him in New York City, and DeGaulle traveled there to meet him personally. At the time, Eugene Bullard was working as ... An elevator operator.

Not long after Eugene Bullard met with the President of France, he passed away, and today very, very few Americans, and especially African-Americans, even know who he is. But, now YOU do, don't you? And I hope you'll be able to find opportunities to tell other people about this great American hero that probably only 1 American in 1 Million has ever heard of.