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The American Society of Le Souvenir Français Inc.
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Honoring Eugene Bullard (9 Oct 1894 - 13 Oct 1961) on this Black History Month

The first African-American fighter pilot

In August 1914, Germany declared war on France. Bullard enlisted in the French Foreign Legion in October 1914, nearly three years before American troops entered combat.

Bullard was seriously wounded in March 1916 at Verdun while serving with the French Army, 170th Infantry Regiment, 48th Infantry Division. Recovering from his wounds, Bullard volunteered for aviation service and completed his flight training in May 1917.

Bullard flew more than 20 combat missions in the French Air Force (Lafayette Flying Corps & Squadron N.85) before the end of the war.



Eugene Bullard (far left) in a group shot circa 1914–1918 (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Air Force)

Declared "A true French Hero" by General Charles de Gaulle

After the armistice, Bullard remained in France where he worked as a musician and nightclub manager. When Germany invaded France in 1940, Bullard again enlisted as an infantryman, serving with the French 51st Infantry Regiment and was again wounded in action in defending Orléans on June 15, 1940. He managed to return to the United States the following month after escaping the German-occupied northern part of France.

Bullard received no less than 15 decorations from the government of France, including the Croix de guerre, Médaille militaire, Croix du combattant volontaire 1914–1918, and Médaille de Verdun, along with several others.

In 1954, the French government invited Bullard to Paris to be one of the three men chosen to rekindle the everlasting flame at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier under the Arc de Triomphe.

In 1959, he was made a *Chevalier* (Knight) of the *Légion d'honneur* by General Charles de Gaulle, who called Bullard a "*véritable héros français*" ("true French hero").

Despite his fame overseas, Bullard faded into obscurity in his home country. In 1961, shortly before his death, Bullard, a decorated veteran of two world wars, was working as an elevator operator in New York City. He died October 12, 1961 at the age of 66.



Eugene Bullard with his "Croix de Guerre" earned at the Battle of Verdun
(Photo courtesy of US Air Force)

A War Hero in our two countries

In 1989 he was posthumously inducted into the inaugural class of the Georgia Aviation Hall of Fame. On August 23, 1994 – 33 years after his death, and 77 years to the day after the physical that should have allowed him to fly for his own country — Bullard was posthumously commissioned a second lieutenant in the United States Air Force and recognized as the First Black American fighter pilot in history

On October 9, 2019, the Museum of Aviation in Warner Robins, Georgia erected a statue in Bullard's honor.

There is a sign in Columbus, Georgia, near the site of the house where he grew up, which describes his early life.

He is buried at Flushing Cemetery in Queens, NY (Section C, No. 7, Plot 53), aka the "Carré des Anciens Combattants". The lot is the property of the Federation of French War Veterans, Inc. in perpetuity.



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The American Society of Le Souvenir Français, Inc. regularly joins the Federation of French War Veterans and the Association des Cadres de Réserve Français aux Etats-Unis (ACREFEU: French Reserve Officers in the USA) at the annual ceremony .

The American Society of Le Souvenir Français Inc.'s Missions:

- To preserve the memory of the French soldiers, sailors and airmen who made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom, as well as those who did great deeds in the United States,
- To promote the esteem for French culture and heritage in the United States,
- To strengthen the long-standing traditional bonds of friendship between the American and French peoples, and to this end: erect or maintain memorials and monuments and encourage historical research, public presentations and publications in the media.

Help us implement several historical memorial projects celebrating the 243 year-old French-American friendship and alliance!

Contact: Thierry Chaunu, Président

132 East 43rd Street #341 The Chrysler Building New York, NY 10017

Email: thierrychaunu@gmail.com Mobile: 646-732-1822

