

Shot down

Former Tuskegee airman shares his story at Cloverdale

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Shot down over enemy territory in Germany, retired U. S. Air Force Lt. Col. Alexander Jefferson, a combat pilot, vividly remembers both World War II and his return to civilian life.

Jefferson, 80, and a Detroit resident will speak at a 1 p.m. Jan. 21 Peace Pole dedication at Cloverdale Developmental Center, 33000 Freedom Road, in observance of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday.

He was among about 1,000 pilots who received their wings at the Tuskegee Institute and the Tuskegee Army Airfield in Alabama and received the Purple Heart just last year. In January 1944, he graduated from flight school. Jefferson's P-51

Mustang with a single seat and a 1,500 horsepower engine was considered a Porsche. The P-51 could accompany bombers all the way to Berlin and back.

On August 12, 1944, Jefferson was shot down over Germany while firing at radar stations close to the ground, under heavy fire from troops below.

"I got hit 50 feet off the ground," he said.

Fellow pilots saw his plane go down, but didn't see Jefferson bail out. So, at first, they thought he was dead.

"They sent a KIA (Killed in Action) telegram back to my mother and father," he said. His parents learned three months later that he was still alive. "My mother's hair went white," Jefferson said.

Jefferson's parachute didn't



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BAZZLER
Guest speaker: Alexander Jefferson is a Tuskegee Airman and former German prisoner of war.

open until he reached the trees, so he had scratches, bruises and contusions.

He remained in a German prisoner of war camp for nine months, where, he said, "I was

treated like an officer and a gentleman. I was treated better in Germany than I was in Mississippi."

Jefferson explained that Germany and the United States had signed an agreement at the Geneva Convention regarding treatment of prisoners of war.

"They knew more about me than I knew about myself," Jefferson said. "The Germans knew everything, had all my grades, even knew how much taxes my father paid on his Detroit house at 28th and Michigan and his social security number. I didn't even know that. They knew more about me than I knew about myself. That's intelligence."

When Jefferson flew, he protected the bombers, who blew up trains, barges on the Danube River and trucks. Unfortunately, as a prisoner, he suffered when those supply lines were disrupted.

"That's the reason why we didn't have enough food," Jefferson said. "I sat the war out inside barbed wire, reading and knitting socks. The only thing lacking was food."

Chinese buffet awaits approval

By HEATHER NEEDHAM
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A new Chinese buffet restaurant is awaiting final city approvals and will tentatively be open within a couple weeks.

Rong Rong Buffet, 28333 Grand River, will specialize in Szechuan, Hunan, Cantonese and Chinese cuisine, as well as fresh seafood, said owner Rong Liu, a China native. Liu spoke through interpreter Jon Huang.

The restaurant's tentative hours of operation will be 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily. A full menu will be available in addition to the buffet, and carry out and catering services will be available, too. A 38-item daily lunch special menu will include such favorites as Kung Pao chicken, General Tso's chicken and chow mein, chop suey, and sweet and sour dishes made with a variety of seafood and meats.

Lunch buffet prices will range from \$4.25 for children under 12 to \$8.25 for adults, and will be served until 3 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Dinner buffet prices will range from \$6.50 for children under 12 to \$9.95 for

adults. When the war ended, he came back home to the "same old, same old," forced to sit in the back of the bus and drink from separate water fountains. Jefferson also believes he and his wife, Adella, experienced "red-lining," a term used to describe discrimination in housing, home loans or insurance.

The couple had \$5,000 in 1949 but couldn't get a mortgage to buy an \$8,000 house at Outer Drive and Rynn.

"It's in the mortgage and the deed," Jefferson said. "It showed you the redlining and the discrimination between banks, lending institutions and real estate dealers."

The couple found a vacant lot on which to build. When Jefferson began teaching school, he got a loan through the Detroit Teachers Credit Union. At Duffield Elementary at Clinton and Chene, he taught elementary science.

"As a black teacher in 1948, they could only place me in one of five schools," Jefferson said. In 1954, he was sent to Pat-tongill Elementary, at Joy Road and Maplewood. Jefferson fin-

ished his career as an assistant principal at Ferry Elementary at Palmer and Chene. Over the years, he has experienced great sadness. His wife died in 1970 and daughter Alexis died from complications of anorexia in 1996 at age 47.

But he has never forgotten his years in the service or his ties to friends and comrades. Jefferson belongs to the Detroit Chapter of Tuskegee Airman, which has 120 members, one of more than 40 chapters in the United States.

Jefferson also shares his experiences as a public speaker all year long, except for February when he heads to Hawaii.

He tells young people to value their freedoms, providing a sample of what he says to them during his speeches:

"You have freedom of speech, freedom of worship, all these freedoms. Yet you sit here fat, dumb and stupid, degrading yourself and degrading your women with this Rap. Wake up. I've been to Africa, and I'm not going back. I was so glad to get back here. Read, read. Take advantage of this wonderful land we live in. God bless America."

to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturdays. On Sundays, all-day dinner buffets will run \$7.50 for children under 12 to \$10.99 for adults.

Liu has worked in the restaurant business since coming to the United States nine years ago. Most recently, he worked as a chef, and he plans to supervise the cooking at Rong Rong.

"So far, this is the first one," he said, adding that he may open another restaurant if Rong Rong goes well.

Liu hails from the Fu Keng province in Southeast China, and his wife and children still live there.

Rong Rong is opening in a building previously occupied by Blakeney's, which closed a couple years ago.

Hills City Manager Steve Brock said the city gets calls periodically from people interested in opening new businesses and attempts to match the people as best as it can with property. In this case, the former Blakeney's apt turned out to be a good match for Rong Rong.

"I think it's great," Brock said. "I wish them well — and plan to stop in, too."



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BAZZLER

Ready for business: The signs are up at Rong Rong Chinese Buffet, located on Grand River in the former Blakeney's Restaurant. Owners are waiting for official approvals to open.

adults, and will be served from 4:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 4:30 p.m.

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