

*The following is a transcription of a speech made by artist David Greenwood at the dedication of his new sculpture on August 14, 2009. "Fallen Comrade" is a stylized P-51 Mustang installed at Michigan Legacy Art Park.*

My name is David Greenwood and I'm a war baby. Three years before I was born the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Three months before I was born the D-Day assault took place. One week before I was born Operation Market Garden began – with its aerial assault on Holland.

In the month I was conceived, (I'm sure my parents would love to hear me talking about this!) the Tuskegee Airmen had already finished a grueling tour of duty in North Africa and were moved north to Italy to bring the war more directly to the enemy. Three months *after* I was born these gentlemen to my left were fighting the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes.

Of course I had no awareness of any of this. I was quite content in my cradle. But with aging comes a broader and deeper interest in history and - in looking back - I can't help but wonder how my parents found the courage and optimism to bring a child into such a world. I have to think their courage and optimism were heightened by the actions of men like the Tuskegee Airmen, of these veterans present today and of my father's best friend.

By the time World War II began my father had finished veterinary school. He tried to enlist in the cavalry, imagining himself caring for horses – horses, it now seems hard to believe, that men were still willing to ride into battle! Instead he was assigned to home front duty helping insure the health of herd animals and thereby the nation's food supply.

Meanwhile, his college roommate and best friend joined the Army Air Corps and became a bomber pilot, flying B-17s out of England and Italy. Skip later became an honorary uncle and I always viewed him with a sense of wonder. He never spoke about his missions over Europe but I imagine him looking out his cockpit window and seeing the red-tailed fighter escort of the Tuskegee Airmen.

But – as I say, I have no memory of World War II. An accident of birth doesn't give one the right to speak on the subject. And I have not one shred of experience that would allow me to speak for, or about, the Tuskegee Airmen. I'm grateful that we have Chauncey Spenser II here today to do that.

While I have no memory of the war, I do have clear memories, such clear memories of the post-war era and the aura that hung over our childhoods - as war babies ceased to be born and the first baby boomers arrived.

I remember the atmosphere, only faintly realized then, of a nation not so much breathing a sigh of relief as collectively inhaling - daring to breathe again. Anything was possible.

And I remember the history and the myths handed down to us in movies, television and in the very toys that were placed in our hands.

I was a model builder. It didn't matter if they were plastic or balsa, if they were large scale or small, I built any I could get my hands on – battleships, destroyers, cruisers, submarines, flattops, B-17s, B-24s, Corsairs, Spitfires, Hurricanes, Mustangs of course and even Zeros and Messerschmitts. I remember holding these planes in my hands and so clearly projecting myself bodily into their tiny cockpits to soar with my heroes.

Art is not made in the linear fashion of building a model. Nor is it conceived of in logical steps. That is why it is difficult for me today to talk about the inspiration for this sculpture. As artists we are bombarded from all sides by myriad influences over time. So what you will see today is an amalgam of information, inspiration, imagination and experience gathered over many years.

I do want to state clearly that this sculpture is not a bellicose call to war – quite the opposite – it is a comment on the terrible losses of war and a tribute to those who went forth despite the terrible price.

But that's the adult David talking to you. The childhood David can still walk this trail, come around that bend and be filled with wonder and delight at finding this object lying on the forest floor. He can climb into this mythic symbol and once again imagine soaring.

So if I have succeeded, this sculpture in this particular place will speak to many people in many different ways. For me it hovers in the realm between fact and myth, between history and memory. I hope you will enjoy it and I thank you for being here today.

David Greenwood