

Did we know???



**Colonel John C. Robinson,
later known as the Brown Condor returning home in 1936**

John Charles Robinson was born in 1903 in Carrabelle, Florida. Before all his stardom, he completed his pilot's training and earned his wings from Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama in 1920. Immediately after earning his flying license in 1927, Robinson started his own flying school in Chicago for blacks. He even founded an Air Pilots Association for black aviators, and he launched a "John Robinson Airlines." Then he attended another mainstream flight school in Chicago where in 1931 and became the first African American to break the color barrier and graduate from the institution... Even after his bona fide graduation local airfields were closed to black pilots to use. So, Robinson got together with some supporters and financed the establishment of another private airport, which was duly certified by the authorities to be used by black pilots.

When he heard of what was happening in Ethiopia and sensed the indignation and frustration of the black community at its inability to do something about it, he decided to show the way. The more he saw the black frustration, the more he was impelled to offer his services to fight fascism (dictatorship) in Ethiopia. When Robinson received a cable from the U.S. visa office, he cautiously reasoned that he was going to Ethiopia on business to sell civilian airplanes. He arrived in Ethiopia at the end of May 1935.

Ethiopia had neither combated trained national pilots nor combat aircraft at the time, out of less than two-dozen mostly dysfunctional aircrafts. Robinson gain international fame as a pilot during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. At the outset of World War II, he took command of the Imperial Ethiopian Air forces handful of obsolete aircraft. So that is what he exactly did. Then the emperor was offering him a commission in the Ethiopian army. With that one aircraft, the intrepid Brown Condor flew incessantly on dangerous missions—not to mention a terrain and airspace he was unfamiliar with—from Addis to Adwa and back. He was carrying supplies, fighters and the Emperor from place to place in the very heat of the war, when the Fascists were controlling the skies and raining down bombs and poison gases. They tried to down him but could not. Robinson gives an eyewitness account of Fascist bombing spree in Adwa where he witnessed the very first assaults of the Fascist elements across the Mereb River on 3 October 1935. Professor William Scott in his book, *The Sons of Sheba's Race*, paraphrases the Brown Condor's description of that first day of bombing and the tragic reaction of innocent civilians in Tigray:

"When Italian planes attacked the Ethiopian towns of Adwa and Adigrat at the start of Rome's African campaign, Robinson was caught along with Ethiopian civilians and military in the wanton and bloody bombardment. He had been sent on a courier mission to Adwa, scene of Italy's humiliating defeat in 1896, the day before the surprise attack. Staying there overnight, Robinson was awakened at dawn by the terrible noise of explosions. Four large bombing planes arrived...and began bombing. Many people ran for cover in the city's outskirts. Others sought refuge at the Red Cross hospital, imagining they would be protected there, but it too was shelled and was the scene of the heaviest casualties. Infuriated Ethiopian soldiers, anxious to engage the enemy in battle, ran out into the streets, waving their swords and challenging their adversaries to descend from the clouds and fight like men in hand-to-hand combat."

Although the Fascists failed to down his plane, however the Brown Condor was shot at, wounded on his left hand, but still managed to land safely. Unfortunately despite all his effort to drive away, fascist Italy entered in Addis. On the eve of the Fascist entry of into Addis Ababa on May 5, 1936, Robinson had to return back to the United States. Later, after the tragic war had ended, Colonel Robinson was returned to Ethiopia in 1944 as head of a team of African American aviators and technicians to help build a modern Ethiopian Air Force.

The self-styled “Brood” which included the three leaders of the group was: John Robinson, Puerto-Rican Electrician, and a Radio Technician. They set up a shop in Orma garage in Addis Ababa and advanced the skills and trained 80 cadets over 2 years that formed the nuclei of the colonels in the air force.

Robinson had some difficulties with the Swedish pilot, Count Von Rosen, who had also served in Ethiopia. Von Rosen let it be known in Addis Ababa's diplomatic community that he was not pleased to be outranked by Colonel Robinson and under his (Robinson's) command. Despite this incident of racism, Robinson persevered in building up Ethiopia's Air Force. Robinson and Von Rosen were the most qualified pilots for the job. They both arrived at the pick-up point in separate aircraft. According to witnesses, Major Von Rosen refused Colonel Robinson's order to fly in the right seat as copilot, saying something to the effect that he, Von Rosen, would not fly with a N-----. Robinson climbed into the C-47 alone and flew the large plane to Addis Ababa. A few more words were exchanged between the two men a fight resulted. Robinson broke Von Rosen's jaw and, evidently, the pride of Sweden. Von Rosen made a formal complaint and Robinson was placed under house arrest for two days. Ethiopia's post war air force was largely a Swedish financed and supplied affair – a risk in their relationship that would devastate both sides.

Robinson resigned from the service to set up Sultan Airlines which was based in Turkey but joined with one of the Emperor Haile Selassie's sons, Prince Makonnen, import firm and accepted top position in the Duke's new school of aviation in Addis Ababa.

Robinson and another son of Africa, Dr. Talbot, took up life in Ethiopia to create the educational American Institute. Throughout the campaign Robinson remained a consultant to the Ethiopian Ministry of War. This meant a lot to Ethiopia and African- Americans who wanted freedom from Fascism.

On March 13, 1954 Robinson volunteered for an emergency flight to deliver blood and crashed. Although he barely survived the accident, he died two weeks later in hospital. He was mourned by thousands on two continents. As he died, he must have felt proud of the hard work he did to show Blacks and Ethiopians have a voice!

"Many years later, Haile Selassie I would comment on the efforts:
"We can never forget the help Ethiopia received from N-----
Americans during the crisis...It moved me to know that Americans of
African descent did not abandon their embattled brothers, but stood
by us."

When I watched on Youtube Archbishops Melketsadik and Mekarios
along with Journalist Abebe Gelaw and Tamagne Beyene speak
against Meles it reminded me, Colonel Robinson's mission to
Ethiopia. We need more Robinsons on the international level to save
the historic places like Waldeba, Axum, Blue Nile River and other
historical places. The current crisis of Ethiopia should surface on the
international media with our united voices.

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Source:

The Brown Condor: The True Adventures of John C. Robinson By: Thomas E. Simmons
Ethiopia and the United States Volume 1; the Season of Courtship By: Negussay Ayele
www.raceandhistory.com