

# TUSKEGEE AIRMEN, INCORPORATED

## GENESIS AND GROWTH

By William R. Melton  
Tuskegee Airmen, Class 43G

Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. traces its roots to Godman Air Force Base, Kentucky, 1945, when a group of Tuskegee Airmen from Chicago, Illinois, who were caught up in the massive post WWII demobilization of the United States Air Force formed the Chicago Officers' Council. This group transplanted itself to Chicago, Illinois, and existed with no clearly defined purpose other than comradeship.

In 1965 at Chicago, IL, an attempt was made under the leadership of these re-named Chicago "Dodgers" to form various groups of Tuskegee Airmen throughout the country into a national entity with the goal of promoting comradeship and defining and interpreting the unique history of the all black air force during WWII.

In 1972 at Detroit, Michigan, a renewed effort was initiated by Ario Dixione to organize and sponsor annual reunions of Tuskegee Airmen located at different locations throughout the country. Over 500 Tuskegee Airmen attended the 1972 Detroit reunion.

Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. was actually formed in 1973 at Washington, D.C., when steering groups were formed to establish a national organization under the leadership of a National Executive Board of Directors and three Regional administrative entities: Eastern, Central, and Western. In 1974 at the third annual reunion in Los Angeles, the process of establishing Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. as a corporate organization were eventually resolved. In 1978, Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. was accredited by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501 (c) 3 national entity.

In April 1976, Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. was comprised of five chapters: The East Coast Chapter (Washington, D.C.), Central Chapter (Detroit, MI), Greater Philadelphia Chapter, West Coast Chapter (Los Angeles), and the Chicago Chapter. As of January 2006, there are forty-eight (48) chapters nationwide.

Major accomplishments of Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.:

1. Establishment and development of the Tuskegee Airmen National Scholarship Fund, which has awarded 839 scholarships since 1978 for a total amount of \$1,187,500.

2. The dedication of a monument honoring WWII Tuskegee Airmen at the United States Air Force Museum, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton, OH in August 1985.
3. The dedication of Tuskegee Airmen, Incorporated National Historical Museum at historic Ft. Wayne, Detroit, MI on May 29, 1987. This museum serves as a repository for archives and memorabilia of the national organization of Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.
4. The presentation of the gift of an eight foot statue of a WWII Tuskegee Airman to the United States Air Force Academy on May 6, 1988.
5. The consummation of a formal agreement with LUCASFILM, LTD., for the production of a movie depicting the WWII exploits of the Tuskegee Airmen on February 7, 1990.
6. Appointment of TAI National President Nancy Leftenant Colon as a member of the Advisory Committee of the Big Brothers – Big Sisters of America organization, which inaugurated a national mentorship program during their annual convention at Dallas Texas on June 21, 1990.
7. Presentation of the Milton Caniff Spirit of Flight Award by Lt. General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., USAF, (Ret) to Tuskegee Airmen during National Aviation Hall of Fame enshrinement ceremonies July 21, 1990 at Dayton OH.
8. In August 1995, at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of TAI, the TV movie, The Tuskegee Airmen, written by original Tuskegee Airmen, Robert Williams premiered.
9. At the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of TAI in Atlanta Georgia, the United States Air Force vindicated all of those individuals who had stood against the unlawful order at Freeman Field, Indiana.
10. August 12, 1995, at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention Banquet of TAI, the United States Air Force set aside the court martial conviction and restored all the rights, privileges, and property to (TAI President) Lt. Roger C. Terry had lost because of the conviction.
11. In 1997, TAI National Headquarters opened in Arlington Virginia.
12. July 13, 2005 Tuskegee Airmen Incorporated hosted a reception in conjunction with "A Legislative Day on Capitol Hill" in the quest for the Congressional Gold Medal for Tuskegee Airmen.
13. October 4, 2005 Tuskegee Airmen Incorporated succeeded in its push to get Congress's highest honor for Tuskegee Airmen, when the United State Senate voted unanimously (S.392) to authorize President Bush to award the Tuskegee Airmen the Congressional Gold Medal in honor of their military record.
14. December 14, 2005 Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld sent a letter to Representative Charles B. Rangel stating his support for HR 1259 - the Congressional Gold Medal for Tuskegee Airmen.