

THE USAF PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY
PRESENTS

PIONEERS IN BLUE



photos by Senior Airman Stephany Miller

GARY SHAW



BIOGRAPHY



Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Gary Shaw is a 35 year Air Force veteran who served in Operation LINEBACKER II during the Vietnam War as a Bomb Loader. Shaw's most memorable moment came as a result of his accomplishment in rising through the ranks from an Enlisted Airman to a Commissioned Officer. "I worked pretty hard to become an officer. One of my greatest days was when I was commissioned, my wife was there, my previous squadron commander came," said Shaw. "The Air Force instilled integrity in me and living up to those core values has made a big difference in my life. I honor them up until today," said Shaw. "The Air Force to me, means being professional and having a purpose. It means everything to me and especially to my dad who was a Soldier in the Army," explained an emotional Shaw.

Shaw is currently the Deputy Director at the Maintenance Support Group located at Hill Air Force Base, Utah.

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photos by Pat Nugent

CALVIN SPANN



BIOGRAPHY

Lieutenant (Ret.) Calvin J. Spann served as a fighter pilot with the legendary Tuskegee Airmen. Spann received his wings at Tuskegee, graduating in Class 44G. He trained in the P-47 Thunderbolts in Walterboro, South Carolina in preparation for overseas combat duty. He was a member of the 100th fighter squadron which was part of the legendary 332nd Fighter Group. Spann flew 26 combat missions, completing his tour in Italy.

The Tuskegee Airmen were the first African-American military Airmen in the United States. From 1940 to 1946, just under 1,000 men trained in Tuskegee, Alabama to become pilots, bombardiers or navigators for World War II. The Tuskegee Airman distinguished themselves for their bravery and were instrumental in the integration of the Armed Forces. In 2006, all of the Tuskegee Airmen received the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor.

Today, Spann travels around the country, speaking with young people and telling the stories of the Tuskegee Airmen.



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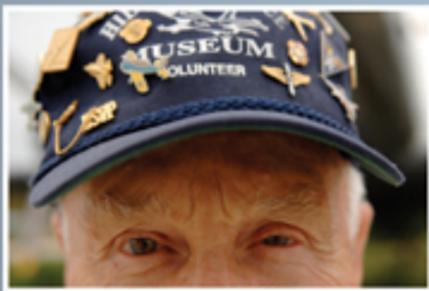
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photos by Staci Miller

KAY STOWELL



BIOGRAPHY

Kay Stowell is a 27 year Air Force veteran who served in the Army Air Corps and the Army National Guard as a C-47 Skytrain pilot. The Skytrain was widely used by American and British forces for aerial transport during World War II. Stowell supported aerial drops of paratroopers and cargo, evacuated wounded service members, and flew VIPs throughout the war. "What touched me the most happened after Germany surrendered. We had the honor of flying our U.S. infantry troops in an aerial tour over the Italian battlefronts that they had courageously fought through," said Stowell.

Stowell believes that the military has provided him with great values like discipline, obedience, and respect for his country and flag. "I have passed this respect for the flag and our country to my family," said Stowell.

Mr. Kay Stowell currently volunteers at the Hill Air Force Base Aerospace Museum. He also serves 2 to 3 times a week as a military honor guard at funerals in Ogden, Utah.



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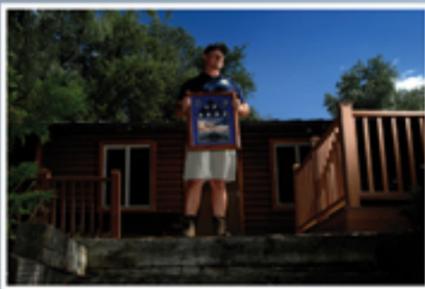
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photos by Stephany Miller

SHANE THOMAS



BIOGRAPHY

Master Sergeant (Ret.) Shane Thomas is a 20 year Air Force veteran who served in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM as a paralegal. During Thomas' first deployment in support of IRAQI FREEDOM, he was instrumental in establishing the new Iraqi court system. "It was a real awesome experience to be a part of history," said Thomas. In his second deployment he and his boss became the focal point for all military justice actions on Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan.

He believes the pinnacle of his career was in performing the special duties of a First Sergeant. A First Sergeant is responsible for the morale, welfare, and conduct of all the enlisted members in a squadron and is the Chief Adviser to the Squadron Commander concerning the enlisted force. "Accomplishment to me means coming back to help people out," he said. "As a First Sergeant I felt fortunate to provide that support to the Airmen," said Thomas.

Thomas is currently a mechanic at the Outdoor Recreation Center on Hill Air Force Base, Utah.



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photo by Staff Sgt. Michael B. Keller

CHARLES TUPPER

BIOGRAPHY



Colonel (Ret.) Charles Tupper is a 39 year Air Force veteran who served on both active duty and the Air National Guard as an enlisted member and later a Commissioned Officer. He enlisted in 1970 as a KC-135A crew chief at Pease Air Force Base, New Hampshire, and went on to become a commissioned Nurse serving in clinical, flight, and headquarters positions. Tupper finished out his active duty career as the Commander of the 43rd Medical Operations Squadron at Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina. He retired from the Air National Guard in 2009 as a Colonel and Commander of the 439th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron at Westover, Massachusetts.

After his retirement Tupper became a registered nurse for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

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photo by Lance Cheung

DICK UYEHARA



BIOGRAPHY

First Lieutenant (Ret.) Dick Uyehara is a five year Air Force veteran who served at Pusan Air Base during the Korean War. He was a navigator in the A-26 bomber. Uyehara remembers flying on moonlit nights deep into North Korea at 300 to 500 feet off the treetops. "It was so low anti-aircraft fire came down from ridge lines," said Uyehara. He recalled how trains would run for cover in tunnels. "We'd fly fast and low, straight toward a train tunnel. The trick was to skip 500-pound bombs into the openings without us slamming into the mountain," said Uyehara. In 1955, he was forced to eject from a B-57 Canberra bomber aircraft at 600 miles per hour over Washington D.C. - ending his flight and taking both his legs. He had to struggle free from a malfunctioning ejection seat only to have the stabilizer hit him during the bailout. It severed one leg and mangled the other. Teri, his wife said, "He never let it beat him," although he was in great pain. After his release he never used a wheelchair, preferring to walk unaided on prosthetic legs, Teri said.

Uyehara is currently a Dental Technician for Hollywood celebrities. He retired in Grand Junction, Colorado.



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photo by Staff Sgt. Tim Chacon

ROBERT WILLBANKS

BIOGRAPHY



Senior Master Sergeant (Ret.) Robert Willbanks is a 24 year Air Force veteran who served as a Hydraulics Mechanic and Aerospace Systems supervisor. He enlisted in 1961, was involved in combat missions during the Vietnam War, and retired in 1985. Willbanks feels strongly that the Air Force has so much to offer. "There are so many variables that you have to handle throughout your tours. You have to deal with so many personalities and situations. It teaches you so much about yourself," said Willbanks. "If I could give advice about going into the Air Force, I would say go for it! Education is where it's at, get all the education that you can. And learn through all your mentors."

After retiring from the Air Force, Willbanks worked for the Air Force as a civil servant aircraft Components Part Quality Control Inspector. He is currently living with his wife Jerre in Layton, Utah.

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photos by Staff Sgt. Bennie J. Davis III

CHUCK YEAGER



BIOGRAPHY



Brigadier General (Ret.) Chuck Yeager is famous for being the first pilot to exceed the speed of Mach 1. In 1976, he was awarded a Congressional Silver Medal in recognition of having broken the sound barrier in the experimental aircraft, the Bell X1 in 1947. Yeager enlisted as a Private in the Army Air Forces in 1941 and became an aircraft mechanic. He demonstrated a natural ability as a pilot and received his wings and a promotion to flight officer in 1943. During World War II he distinguished himself by becoming an Ace by shooting down five enemy aircraft in a single day. After the war he transitioned into the Air Force to become a test pilot. In 1997 General Yeager ended more than 50 years of flying for the Air Force as an Ace fighter pilot, test pilot, commander and consultant. During a speech after his final flight, he stated, "All that I am ... I owe to the Air Force."

In 2004, Congress voted to authorize President George W. Bush to promote Yeager to the rank of Major General.

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