



Maj. Gen. Loren Reno affixes a commander's pin to Col. Allen Jamerson's uniform moments after the colonel became the new commander of the 72nd Air Base Wing during a July 18 ceremony at Tinker Air Force Base, Okla. The wing has African Americans currently serving in its top three leadership positions. (U.S. Air Force photo/Margo Wright)

60 years celebrated!

7/25/2008 - **TINKER AIR FORCE BASE, Okla. (AFP)** -- The service has come a long way in 60 years, as the military celebrates the 60th Anniversary of integration in the armed forces July 26 here.

Tinker Air Force Base members reflect that progress, with African Americans currently serving

in the top three 72nd Air Base Wing leadership positions.

Col. Allen Jamerson assumed command of the 72nd ABW July 18, marking a distinct moment in Tinker AFB history. Colonel Jamerson, who also serves as the installation commander, Col. Mona Lisa Tucker, the 72nd ABW vice commander and Chief Master Sgt. Eric Harmon, the 72nd ABW command chief, are all of African American descent.

The 72nd ABW provides base operations support to more than 28,000 military and civilian personnel assigned to the Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center and 45 associate units.

"The possibility of the three of African American holding these positions was just a dream 60 years ago," Colonel Jamerson said. "In today's Air Force, it's really just business as usual."

Before President Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9981, the military was segregated, like much of the rest of society. There were all-black military units in every major American war since the Civil War. One of the most famous units was the Air Force's Tuskegee Airmen. Colonel Jamerson is quick to recognize the efforts of those men and realizes that the Air Force has come a long way.

"Pioneers such as the Tuskegee Airmen and the other all-black units paved the way for their successors coming up through the ranks," he said. "They broke down the myths and stereotypes of the era. Their sacrifices and successes have paid off not only for African Americans, but for all military personnel who aspire to be leaders."

Colonel Tucker, who has been the wing's vice commander since July 2007 said, "The 72nd Air Base Wing supports one of the most diverse installations in the Air Force. From depot maintenance to airborne warning and control, strategic communications and so much more, Tinker AFB is a national defense asset. I am extremely proud to be part of this wing's senior leadership team and hopefully serve as an example of the opportunities that await all Airmen."

"When I look back at the past and now at the present, this is truly an amazing opportunity to serve with Colonel Jamerson and Colonel Tucker. I am thankful as a migrant from Guyana, South America, and as an African American to be blessed to serve in this capacity at the hallmark of this historical event that marks the 60th anniversary of the integration of the armed forces. This would not be possible without the many sacrifices of the pioneers and many brave African Americans before us who made it possible for everyone regardless of their racial or cultural background to serve in key leadership positions," said Chief Harmon.

On July 26, 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed the executive order establishing the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, committing the government to integrating the segregated military. The order stated that "there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed forces without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin."

"The armed forces helped pioneer much of the change in America the past six decades and your country is much better off for it. I'm honored to command the 72nd Air Base Wing, and to serve alongside Colonel Tucker, Chief Harmon and all of the outstanding Tinker Airmen, civilian, and contractors that support our nations defense," Colonel Jamerson said.