

# BIOGRAPHY

## A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

TUSKEGEE AIRMEN INC. PUBLIC RELATIONS, P.O. Box 830060  
TUSKEGEE, AL 36083

### THOMAS E. HIGHSMITH, JR.



Thomas E. Highsmith, Jr, affectionately known as “Billy”, was born 8 November 1925 in Elizabeth, New Jersey to Thomas E. Highsmith, Sr. and Marian Highsmith. He was the oldest of seven children and graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School, Elizabeth, New Jersey in 1943. In 1968, he married Luciana Goncalves.

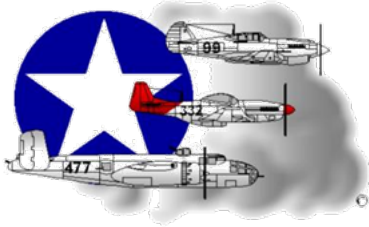
The same year of his high school graduation, he attended basic training at Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi. He became a Commissioned Officer at age 19 and attended several training schools between 1944 and 1946. He eventually attained the Aeronautical Rating of Bombardier/Navigator. In 1947, LT Highsmith was assigned to the Tuskegee Airmen 477th Composite Group at Lockbourne Army Air Base, Ohio where he honorably completed his active-duty tour and was discharged. In 1951, Lt Col Highsmith was recalled to active duty during the Korean Conflict, where he utilized his Tuskegee Airman training. He was on active duty a short time and following his discharge in 1952, he began a new chapter. He became a Teacher in the Elizabeth, New Jersey school system. As director of NJ’s Job Corps and Union County Vocational and Technical Schools, he continued to be a leader and inspiration to many young people.

In 1953, Lt Colonel Highsmith joined the NJ National Guard in Newark, NJ where he began his tenure as the Chief Navigator. Once there was a mission change, he changed career fields and for the next sixteen years worked in a Medical Squadron as an Aeromedical Evacuation Control Officer. Other career changes came over the years such as Accounting and Finance Officer, Budget Officer, US Property and Fiscal Officer and finally the Comptroller for the New Jersey Air National Guard. Lt Colonel Highsmith’s career spanned three wars: World War II, Korea, and Vietnam.

Lt Col Highsmith pursued a passion for baseball and exercised his elite athletic ability as a member of the Air Force World Championship Baseball Team and the Newark Eagles of the Negro League. An accomplished pianist, organist and bass player, Lt Col Highsmith played on the Apollo Theater stage in Harlem, New York.

Lt Colonel Highsmith’s military education includes: Aviation Cadet training, Tuskegee, Alabama; Aerial Gunnery training, Tyndall Field, Florida; Aerial Navigation training Hondo Air Force Base, Texas; and Aerial Bombardier training, San Angelo Air Force Base, Texas.





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Lt Col Highsmith's civilian education includes: Bachelor's Degree (completed in three years) and Master's Degree, Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey, teaching and educational administration.

Lt Col Highsmith's military awards include: Unknown

Lt Col Highsmith's civic awards and honors include: Unknown

Lt Colonel Highsmith passed away 23 Jan 2010. He was 84 years old. He is interred at Rosedale and Rosehill Cemetery, Linden, New Jersey, Plot 47A-445/DD. He is survived by his wife Luciana, his son Lt. Col. Thomas Highsmith III, daughter Desyra Highsmith; granddaughters Aria and Lorelei and grandson Thomas IV.

