



# BIOGRAPHY

## A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

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## IVAN J. MCRAE



IVAN JAMES MCRAE was born August 19, 1923, in Harlem, NY to Ivan James Sr. and Laura Orinthia (Magnus) McRae, both of whom emigrated from Kingston, Jamaica in 1916. Ivan attended Roosevelt High School in Yonkers, NY, graduating in 1941. He enlisted in the Army's Aviation Cadet Program, and in 1943 was selected for a first-ever program to include Black Men in Pilot Training, at Tuskegee Army Airfield in Alabama.

Mr. McRae is a veteran of World War II. At 6'1", he was too tall to fit in a fighter plane so he earned his wings as a Twin-Engine Bomber Pilot (Class 44-J-TE) with the famed Tuskegee Airmen and was attached to the 477th Bombardment Group where Benjamin O. Davis Jr. was appointed as Commander. For most of his life, former 2d Lieutenant/B-25 Pilot McRae Jr., rarely spoke of his 1945 involvement in a standoff that helped end segregation in the U.S. military. But when a White Commander at Freeman Army Airfield, Indiana, ordered McRae and other Black Officers not to enter the post's Whites-Only Officers Club — and to use the All-Black Club called "Uncle Tom's Cabin" instead — McRae found himself at a

critical moment of history.

What later became known as the Freeman Field Mutiny was a series of peaceful demonstrations in April 1945 by Black Army Officers who had been transferred to the Midwest airfield after racial altercations at airfields in Michigan and throughout the South. In all, 101 Black Officers were arrested for entering the Officers Club, or for refusing to formally accept the legitimacy of the Club's Whites-Only designation, according to a 1997 Air Force document. The standoff persuaded the War Department to side with the protesters, and for the first time to place Black Officers in command of McRae's All-Black 477th Bombardment Group. Three years later, President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981, which ordered the end of racial segregation in the U.S. military.

Although he was in training for missions against Japan, the War's end spared him from combat. After 2d Lieutenant McRae's discharge, he completed his Bachelor's Degree at Columbia in 1948, and married Marjorie Cox that October. The couple eventually settled in Long Island, where McRae worked for Bulova, Litton Industries and various defense-industry companies, including Fairchild Space and Defense Systems and Gould Simulation Systems. Mr. McRae was a devoted family man, avid photographer, naturalist, and role model to those who knew him. On 29 November 2016, he joined the Lonely Eagle Chapter. He is survived by his wife; sons Brian, of River Vale, New Jersey, Alan, of St. Albans, Queens, and Donald, of Dix Hills; and daughter Beverly McRae, of Dix Hills. He was cremated.

