



BIOGRAPHY

A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

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ROBERT ASHBY



Born in Yemassee, South Carolina, in 1925, Robert Ashby joined the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1944 and graduated as a 2nd Lieutenant in 1945 as one of the original Tuskegee Airmen. His service included a combat tour in Korea. He retired in 1965 with the rank of Lt. Colonel. He began his civilian career as a Flight Operation Instructor with United Airlines. In 1972, he joined Frontier Airlines as the first African American pilot to fly for a commercial airline, and he retired in 1986 as Captain.

As a young boy delivering newspapers, Ashby developed a passion for flight. He was inspired by the stories of African American aviators and aspired to become a Pilot. In 1944, at 17 years old, he Enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps instead of waiting to be drafted. He performed well on tests and was sent to the Tuskegee Institute for Flight Training. Ashby continued his service after World War II and, while stationed in Japan, faced discrimination from his colleagues. During the Korean War, he flew bombers and, after that war, was later stationed in England for a Cold War assignment.

After retiring from the Air Force in 1965, Ashby sought work as a Professional Pilot. He was hired by United Airlines, but they had no Black Pilots at the time, so they assigned him to work as a Ground Flight Operations Instructor. He was part of the team that established the training program for Boeing's 747 airliner. In 1973, he moved to Frontier Airlines, where he became the company's first Black pilot. He started as a Second Officer and was later promoted to Captain before retiring from Frontier in 1986. Ashby is believed to have been the first African American Commercial Pilot to serve the airline industry's mandatory retirement age of 60, and at the time, he was the only Tuskegee Airman documented to have become a Pilot for a Major Commercial Airline.



Robert Ashby joined the "Lonely Eagles Chapter" on March 5, 2020, at 95 years old.

