 **BIOGRAPHY**

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**A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN**

**Tuskegee Airmen Inc. Public Relations, P.O. Box 830060**

**Tuskegee, AL 36083**

# Mr. Thurman Spriggs



Thurman Edward Spriggs was born April 29, 1921 in Des Moines, Iowa, the eldest of seven children to William E. Spriggs and Ruth Neil Maxfield. He graduated from Des Moines East High School where he was on the track team and in the Spanish Club. During the period, he and three of his brothers who attended Des Moines East won six state championships in track and field. After graduation, Mr. Spriggs enlisted in the US Army in March 1941 and was in service when Pearl Harbor occurred. He was assigned to the US Army’s 9th Calvary, nicknamed the Buffalo Soldiers. In 1944, he was admitted into the Army Air Corps, where he graduated flight school as a Fighter Pilot, class 45-H Single Engine,of the famed Tuskegee Airmen. He mustered out as a Lieutenant, serving at Stockton Air Base in California.

Lt. Spriggs met his future wife, Julienne Henderson of Norfolk, Virginia while she was stationed at Fort Des Moines, Iowa the training facility for Officers in the US Women’s Army Corps. She graduated the program as a Sergeant in the Motor Corps. They married December 21, 1945 in Norfolk at Grace Episcopal Church when the war ended.

After the War, Mr. and Mrs. Spriggs settled in Norfolk while they both took advantage of the GI Bill. They attended what was then the Norfolk Division of Virginia State College, and is now Norfolk State University. In October 1946, their eldest child Patricia Julienne was born. Mr. Spriggs continued his studies and graduated from what was then Virginia State College in Ettrick, Virginia, now Virginia State University. With the benefit of a War Bonus to Iowa veterans, Mr. Spriggs was able to move the family to Washington, DC where he would continue his education earning a Master’s degree in Physics from Howard University. He then enrolled in the graduate program at The Catholic University of America, where he would earn a PhD in Physics in 1961, writing a dissertation on particle physics. While working on his Doctorate,he worked in the Infrared Branch of the Solid State Division of the Naval Ordinance Laboratory in White Oak, Maryland. And, his son, William Edward and daughter Karen Elizabeth, were born and the family attended Calvary Episcopal Church.

Upon earning his Doctorate, Dr. Spriggs joined the faculty of the physics department at Howard University. His wife Julienne would complete her education at Howard, while serving as President of the Faculty Wives’ Club. He was recruited to return to his Alma Mater in Norfolk, and the family relocated to the Tidewater region in 1965 where he began teaching at Norfolk State. He taught as the institution grew from the Norfolk Division of Virginia State to Norfolk State College and then Norfolk State University. He played leadership roles in growing science education at the University. His wife Julienne, had an award winning career as a teacher in the Norfolk Public School System. In 1986, he retired as professor emeritus.

For his service as a Tuskegee Airmen, along with the other Iowa Tuskegee Airmen he was inducted into the Iowa Aviation Hall of Fame in Greenfield, Iowa in 2006, and the Iowa African American Hall of Fame in 2010, when he also received the George Washington Carver Medallion from Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa. A Red Tailed P-51 Mustang, installed outside the Iowa Air National Guard in Des Moines, is dedicated to the Iowa Tuskegee Airmen with a plaque listing their names. It was dedicated at a ceremony by the Fort Des Moines Museum and Education Center. In the community, Dr. Spriggs provided leadership to the Norfolk Teachers Association Federal Credit Union and as a vestry member at Grace Episcopal Church.

Dr. Spriggs was preceded in death by his wife of 63 years (passes away in March 2009), his parents and his brothers Aaron (who died in infancy), William Henry and Garland Maxfield, and sisters Ruth Evelyn Turner and Edith Louise Roberson. He is survived by his brother Lacey (and wife Delores) of Des Moines, and his daughters Patricia and Karen (her husband Michael Baldwin) of Virginia Beach and son William (his wife Jennifer) of Great Falls, Virginia, and his grandchildren, William Thurman Spriggs and Rosezetta and Joseph Baldwin, and many nieces and nephews and grand nieces and nephews. Dr. Spriggs passed this life on Monday, December 12, 2016, at his home in Virginia Beach, VA. Again, he was professor Emeritus at Norfolk State University, where he taught from 1965 to 1986; served as Professor in and chair of what is now the Department of Physics and briefly as Chair of the Division of Natural Sciences (now the College of Science, Engineering and Technology). He was the oldest living alum of the

physics department of Howard University.

To learn more about Dr. Thurman Spriggs, other Documented Original Tuskegee Airmen, please visit the Websites at the following locations: [www.TidewaterChapter.com](http://www.TidewaterChapter.com) and [www.](http://www.tai-tidewaterchapter.com/)TuskegeeAirmen.org.

