



Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.™

William "Bill" Campbell Chapter

San Francisco Bay Area



* PRESS RELEASE *

WWII Fighter Pilot / Original Tuskegee Airman “Woodie” Spears

CAPT Leon “Woodie” Spears, USAF (Ret), one of the original Tuskegee Airmen fighter pilots, passed away at age 84, after suffering a severe heart attack. He served bravely as a combat fighter pilot, flying the famous P-51 “*Mustang*” fighter plane during WWII on 51 combat missions, then again during the Korean War. He and his fellow pilots—and their many support members in maintenance, operations, logistics, etc.—were pioneers in breaking racial barriers to become military pilots for America. Fighting two enemies—his own nation for the *opportunity* to fly, and Hitler’s Germany in hostile skies over Europe—Woodie overcame tremendous obstacles in achieving his dream of flying.

Shot down by German “flak” high over Berlin during his 51st mission, Spears survived the near-death event and ensuing POW experiences, only to face stubborn discrimination again when he arrived home in America. Although he wanted to continue to fly, no airlines would hire him, so he became a teacher. Later, he forged a long, successful career with the US Postal Service, rising to executive positions before retiring in 1984. His military awards and decorations include the coveted Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC), Purple Heart, and several Air Medals.

Throughout his life, Woodie retained his love of flying, and used his natural enthusiasm to help motivate others to pursue their own personal dreams. A gifted motivational speaker, he spoke to countless groups-- ranging from grade school through college students and a “Who’s Who” of civic organizations—under his motto of “**Dare to Dream!**” At the time of his death, May 12th, 2008, Woodie still had a calendar full of speaking engagements.

In the past fifteen months Spears experienced some of the highlights of his lifetime: receiving the **Congressional Gold Medal** in the US Capitol Rotunda; attending the world-famous event **Gathering of Mustangs and Legends** in Columbus, OH (invited as one of the 51 *Legends*); flying to Milwaukee, WI as a guest of **Sikorsky Aircraft** (Derco Division) for several presentations in that area; and serving as a keynote speaker for the famous 442nd Regimental Combat Team and Military Intelligence Service—both Nisei Veterans Groups. In 2007 alone, Woodie made forty-four public appearances, and remained a stalwart patriot and standard-bearer for motivation and pursuit of excellence!

A memorial service celebrating Leon “Woodie” Spears’ life will be held Wednesday, May 21st, 2008 at the Chapel of the Chimes, 32992 Mission Blvd., Hayward, CA, 510-538-3131. Proceedings begin at 2 pm, followed by a dramatic, appropriate fly-over of **P-51 Mustangs**, the type of fighter plane Spears flew.

For further information, please contact:

Phil Schasker,
Public Affairs Officer
Tuskegee Airmen, San Francisco Bay Area
408-725-8095
pwschasker@comcast.net

NOTE: Woodie constantly promoted awareness of the Summer Flight Academy, sponsored by the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen. This annual effort in July selects young teens from 14 through 18 who are misdirected and headed in the wrong, destructive direction. The program includes ground school and some hours of flight time, and has literally transformed lives for a productive future, not necessarily in aviation. Any donations would help support this vital program, and can be directed to:

Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.
P.O. Box 8814
Emeryville, CA 94662-0814