

REGARDING ALABAMA VETERAN THADDEUS E. WILLIAMS, JR.:

If there was one thing Thad Williams always dreamed about it was flying. It was a passion he had pursued from the time he was a little boy in Mobile, Alabama, and it was the same passion that led him to the world renowned Tuskegee Institute as a young man. Tuskegee had long held a reputation for not only being a place where young African American flyers could earn their wings, but as one of the finest flight education centers in the country. For a lot of African Americans in the early 1960s, opportunities were limited, but Thad found that, at Tuskegee, the sky truly was the limit. He graduated with a degree in architecture and managed to complete the ROTC program as well. At about the same time, military action was escalating in Vietnam, and, while a lot of young men around the country were looking for a way out of Vietnam, Thad wanted to do his part for his country.

So, instead of waiting to be drafted, he joined up. Not long after enlisting he was assigned to fly helicopters in South Vietnam. It was there he proved to be typical of the airmen who came from Tuskegee, he was a crack flyer. But his dream was cut short on a night mission the evening of January 9, 1966. That night, while crossing the South China Sea, his navigational system failed, making it virtually impossible to fly. Ultimately, his flying career ended on the side of a mountain. A search team was deployed, but none of the crew were found. They had been listed as MIA for over 33 years when, in 1993, Thad's remains were recovered and brought to Arlington National Cemetery. Friends say he could've been a great musician or perhaps a professional athlete, but he died doing what loved best, flying.