

## National Media Release: For Immediate Release

### **America Mourns the Passing of Tuskegee Airman and Trailblazer Jerry T. Hodges Jr. Arkansas' last Tuskegee Airman takes his final flight.**

*Los Angeles, California* — On December 19, 2024, the nation lost one of its last surviving Tuskegee Airmen, [Jerry T. Hodges, Jr.](#), who passed away in Los Angeles at the age of 99. Born on June 29, 1925, in Memphis, Tennessee, and raised in the Arkansas Delta, Hodges was the last known living [Tuskegee Airmen](#) from Arkansas. A member of the esteemed 477th Bombardment Group, Hodges embodied resilience, dedication, and excellence as part of the historic cohort of African-American men who broke barriers during World War II.

Approximately 992 pilots graduated from the segregated Tuskegee training program, with over 450 serving in combat overseas. Hodges was among the more than 500 who completed the rigorous training but did not see aerial combat, joining an elite group of aviators who paved the way for racial integration in the U.S. military. His contributions to aviation history and his lifelong advocacy for education and opportunity leave an indelible legacy.

Jerry T. Hodges Jr. grew up in Heth, Arkansas, where he attended segregated schools and graduated as valedictorian of Robert R. Moton High School in Marianna in 1943. Following his passion for aviation, he left college at Hampton Institute (now [Hampton University](#)) to enlist in the Army Air Corps during World War II. Hodges completed his training at Tuskegee Army Air Field on September 8, 1945, and later served at Lockbourne Air Base in Ohio.

Social historian and Tuskegee Airmen expert [Edmond W. Davis](#), who chronicled the lives of these heroic aviators, reflected on Hodges' legacy, calling him a "man for all seasons—academic, military, professional, and cultural." Davis was instrumental in arranging the historic first phone call between Hodges and his flight instructor, [Dr. Roscoe D. Draper](#) (1919-2024), a monumental moment that brought the teacher and his student together for a heartfelt exchange over the phone 80 years in the making. Hodges had requested to speak with Coach Draper, his esteemed mentor, and Davis made the connection possible.

Hodges' passion extended beyond aviation to arts and culture. A lifelong jazz enthusiast, he celebrated his 99th birthday in June 2024 with a private jazz concert featuring legendary guitarist and vocalist [Daryl Darden](#). "I am honored to perform for this great gentleman and American hero," Darden said of the event, organized by the Los Angeles Chapter of Tuskegee Airmen Inc. Ambassador Jim Nygaard remarked, "This is

one of those events that can only happen once. I'm very proud to have played a small part."

After his military service, Hodges earned a degree in accounting and finance from the [University of Southern California \(USC\)](#) in 1950, becoming one of the first licensed African-American CPAs in Los Angeles. A successful entrepreneur, Hodges opened his own accounting firm, managed a team of employees, and became vice president of one of California's first African-American-owned insurance companies.

Hodges dedicated much of his life to civic and community service. He co-founded the Los Angeles Branch of the David Rockefeller Interracial Council on Business Opportunity and served as president and chairman of the Tuskegee Airmen Scholarship Foundation, providing educational opportunities for future generations. In recognition of his achievements, Hodges was inducted into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame in 2012.

Hodges is survived by his wife, Lillian Reed Hodges, and their two daughters. His life's work continues to inspire countless Americans to strive for equity, perseverance, and excellence.

As we mourn the loss of Jerry T. Hodges Jr., we honor his extraordinary contributions to history, his unwavering commitment to community service, and his role in shaping a more inclusive America. According to Davis, Hodges and the other Tuskegee Airmen and Airwomen were America's first 20th century civil rights fighters before the civil rights movement.

[Edmond W. Davis](#), Social Historian, Assistant Professor of History, and one of the world's leading Tuskegee Airmen authorities.