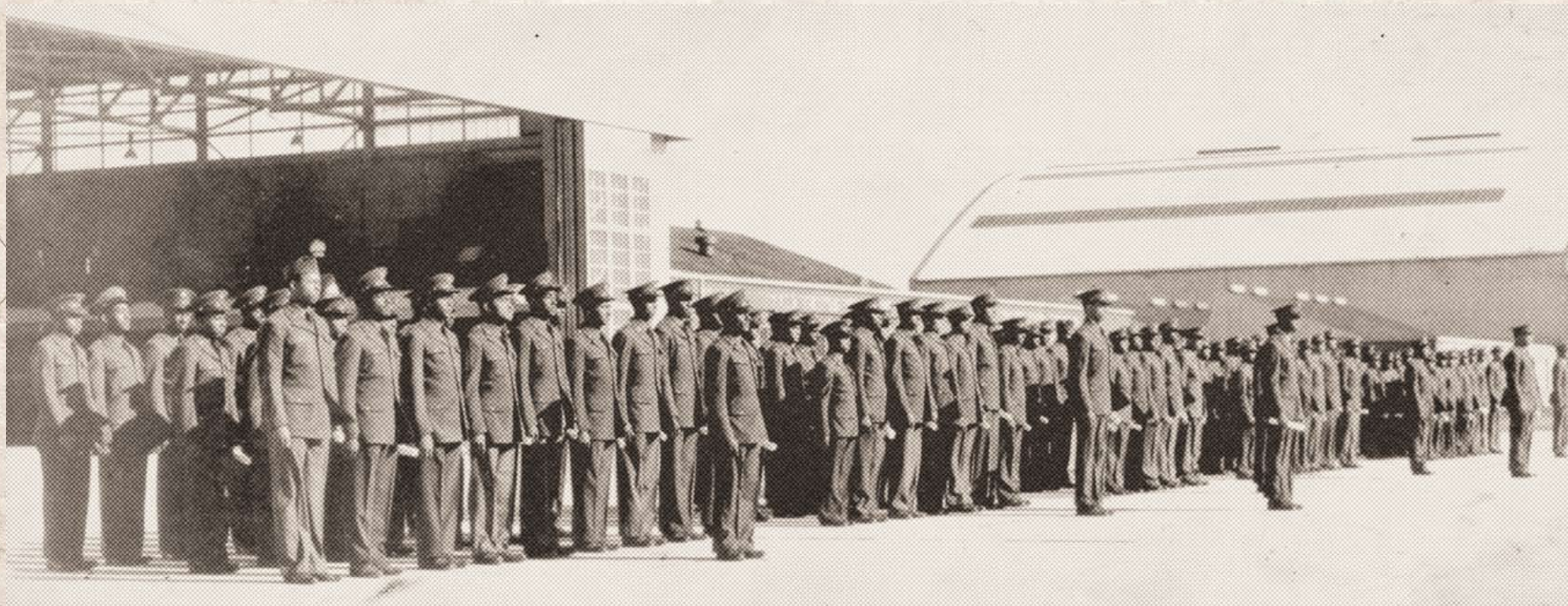




# The Lincoln's Challenge Times

RANTOUL, ILLINOIS

## 99TH PURSUIT SQUADRON The Team That Changed the World and Made History



ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE — The men of the 99th trained to become superior engineers, pilots, and technicians, and achieved a record-setting GPA, all despite tremendous odds against them.

### Dream Outside of the Lines

RANTOUL, March 19, 1941 - A World War II squadron of pilots and grounds crew, the 99th Pursuit Squadron was activated in 1941 at what would become Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, Ill., now the home of Lincoln's Challenge Academy.

Unwanted and set up to fail, the black soldiers of the 99th Pursuit Squadron dreamed outside of the lines of their lives; the restrictions and obstacles that tried to define them. Instead of going along with popular opinion that told them to keep quiet, hang their heads, sweep the floor, settle for less, the men grabbed opportunity to triumph over

ABOVE - The patch of the 99th Pursuit Squadron

racism and raised the bar for achievement. Though they strove under the burden of oppression and abusive words, actions, and beliefs, each man courageously carried on. Whether a mechanic, welder, or radio technician on the ground or pilot in the air, individually each man rocked his job. As a team, the squadron changed the world and made history.

The lives of the Lincoln's Challenge Academy cadets and the men of the 99th Pursuit Squadron parallel in that they both had to walk in tracks that would overcome obstacles. The obstacles back then were different than today's but nevertheless, like the soldiers, the cadets have had to go above and beyond in order to succeed.

All the black men of the 99th Pursuit Squadron were eager volunteers in serving their country—a country that called them mentally inferior and weak in character. By example, they became advocates for equality for blacks and a better life for all.

**PETER THOMAS**  
Lincoln's Challenge Academy  
Director

### Meet Some of the Men of the 99th Leaders That Emerged from Chanute Air Force Base



**Ellsworth Dansby** had his eye on the sky and wanted to fly for the Army Air Corps. When he couldn't, he didn't give up. Instead, he became the first black Master Sergeant and Line Chief. Under his supervision, his ground crew became recognized for its superior skills in maintaining the aircraft and supporting the pilots.



**Benjamin Davis** became the second black man to graduate from West Point Military Academy after enduring four years of the silent-treatment because of his race. He became the first black commander of the 99th. He instilled values of discipline and excellence in his men and advocated for equal rights for blacks in the military.



A civilian pilot, **William Thompson** wanted to fly for the Air Corps. But since he was the only officer trained in armaments, he wasn't allowed to fly. He still did his best for his country and distinguished himself in weapons and armaments. After leaving the Air Force, he dedicated 25 years to teaching in Chicago Public Schools.



#### Letter from the Director

RANTOUL, November 1, 2009 - Each soldier of the 99th in their own way exemplified Lincoln's Challenge Academy Core Objectives:

- Academic Excellence
- Responsible Citizenship
- Leadership/Followership
- Service to Community



This poster is sponsored by Chanute Air Museum and is made possible in part by a grant from the Illinois Humanities Council. Learn more about the 99th Pursuit Squadron, the forerunner of the Tuskegee Airmen, by visiting Chanute Air Museum at 1011 Pacesetter Drive in Rantoul, Ill., or visit online at [www.aerospacemuseum.org](http://www.aerospacemuseum.org).