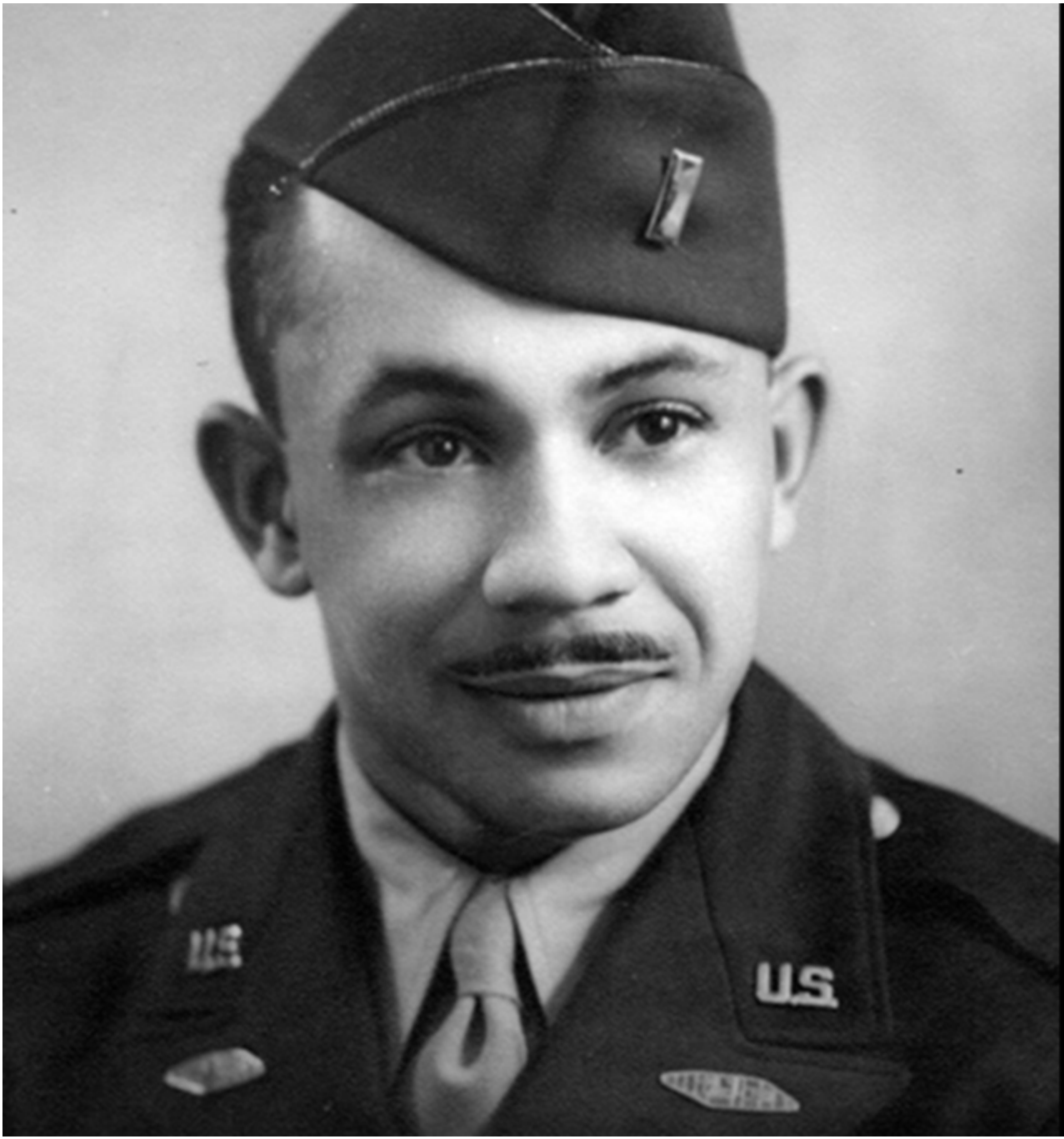




# **A look back in time during Black History Month: Jerseyville was birthplace of two Tuskegee Airmen**

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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*(Note: This is courtesy of the Jersey Historical Society).*

JERSEYVILLE - Jerseyville was the birthplace of two Tuskegee Airmen, Lieutenant George Edward Cisco (shown on the left) and Captain Arnold Wilson Cisco (shown on the right). George and Arnold were the only set of brothers to serve with the Tuskegee Airmen. Their much younger brother and only sibling, Harlow Burghardt Cisco, was also a pilot.

The Tuskegee Airmen were the first black military aviators in the U.S. Army Air Corps, which later became the U.S. Air Force. The group, which included military fighter and

bomber pilots who served in WWII, took their name from the Tuskegee Army Air Field in Alabama, where the pilots trained and attended flight school. The Tuskegee Airmen were known as the red-tails or red-tailed angels because the tails of their planes were painted red. The Tuskegee Airmen flew more than 15,000 individual sorties in Europe and North Africa during WWII and earned more than 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses.



George, Arnold, and Harlow were the sons of Roscoe Amos and Flora (Wilson) Cisco, who were married in Nokomis, Illinois, on June 7, 1917. George was born a year later, on June 2, and Arnold on Aug. 10, 1920. Harlow was born 10 years later.

The Cisco brothers were raised at 418 South State Street. According to a 1914 Sanborn map, it looks like the house was located roughly at the current location of CNB Bank & Trust is located today.

Their father, Roscoe, worked as a cook and a janitor for a private family when George and Arnold were young but later established himself as a talented musician. He taught music lessons and played the organ at the Orpheum Theater on North State Street in Jerseyville for years, before, according to an old newspaper article, he was replaced by the Vitaphone.

George and Arnold attended their first eight grades of school at the old Jerseyville Grade School, which was located on what is now the playground of East Elementary located on Giddings Street.

The two brothers attended the Jersey Township High School, and George graduated with honors in 1935.

The following year, tragedy struck the Cisco family when, at age 45, Roscoe died as a result of appendicitis. He is buried in Oak Grove Cemetery. Arnold was finishing his junior in high school when his father died. He remained in school, served on the J staff his senior year, and then, like his older brother, graduated from high school with honors.

Both George and Arnold attended the University of Illinois. George earned a bachelor's degree in languages and was fluent in French and German. He graduated in 1939, and that fall, both he and his young brother Harlow suffered an appendicitis attack. Unlike their father, both came through their surgeries fine.

Arnold graduated from U of I in 1941 with a bachelor's degree and four years' experience in the Reserve Officer Training Command (ROTC). After graduating, he took the examinations for entrance into the U.S. Air Corp and was accepted. He was sent to Tuskegee Institute for training.

Arnold earned his wings from Tuskegee in April 1943. He was stationed in Ramitelli, Italy, where he served as a flight leader with the 15th Air Force. He flew more than 90 missions, guarding American bombers in air raids over Europe.

George enlisted in the Army in 1942 and graduated from the armored force officer candidate school at Fort Knox, Kentucky, in January 1943 with the rank of Second

Lieutenant. He served with the 761st Tank Battalion, a segregated unit, until March 1943, when he transferred to the Army Air Corps at Arnold's urging. He earned his wings in May 1944.

Tragically, George was killed three months later at Walterboro Army Airfield in South Carolina during a training exercise. There are two accounts of what happened. One states that he had just landed his Thunderbolt when another plane struck him from behind. Another plane landed atop his Thunderbolt as he was waiting to take off. George was 26 years old. He was survived by his wife, Claire, and their 9-month-old daughter, Donna.

Arnold was killed two years, later, in May 1946, also at age 26, when the transport plane in which he was flying hit power lines during a storm and crashed near Tuskegee. He was returning from visiting his wife, Hennie Mae, in Chicago. Hennie was pregnant with their only child, a son she named after his father.

At the time of his death, Arnold had flown more than 90 European missions in his P-51 Mustang, guarding American bombers in air raids over oil fields in Bucharest, Hungary, and earned several medals, including the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Oak Leaf Cluster for meritorious service, and the Purple Heart.

George and Arnold are buried in the Alton City Cemetery.

Unlike his brothers, Harlow graduated from Alton High School. He and his mother, Flora, had moved to Alton in 1941 after she married George Ritchie. After graduation, Harlow enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and, like his brothers, served as a pilot. When the Korean War broke out, he was honorably discharged and sent home due to the Army's policy of sending the last surviving brother home if war breaks out. Harlow died May 30, 1999, in Utah and is buried there.