

Charles Bolden, NASA Administrator

Tuskegee Airman Scholarship Foundation

General James H. “Jimmy” Doolittle Memorial Award

Los Angeles, CA

October 4, 2012

Thank you. There are so many people I want to thank for this honor, beginning with my parents, Charles, Sr. and Ethel Bolden and two Columbia, South Carolina school teachers – King Benjamin Lindberg Jeffcoat and James P. Neal – who taught me at an early age that if I stayed in school, stayed out of trouble and kept the faith...there was nothing I couldn't do.

I have tried to follow their advice and while I have not lived a perfect life, I believe they would be very proud to see me standing here tonight.

I also want to thank Tuskegee Airman Jerry Hodges, the President of the Scholarship Foundation, and all of you who support its mission of preparing a new generation of college educated aviators and aerospace professionals. We at NASA share that goal and I have been privileged to support President Obama's extraordinary efforts to prepare more STEM educated students for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

I cannot tell you what a privilege this is. In addition to the example of my parents, I was fortunate to follow in the footsteps of the Tuskegee Airmen and serve my country, though I chose to become a Marine. I was blessed with the good fortune of becoming an astronaut and now the Administrator or head of NASA.

I am also honored to accept an award named for the great General Jimmy Doolittle. General Doolittle was not only a war hero and a pioneering aviator; he was also an early advocate of an integrated military and a friend to the Tuskegee Airmen. And of course, I stand here tonight on the shoulders of men like Tuskegee Airmen Commander, General Benjamin O. Davis and General Daniel “Chappie” James, who helped get this scholarship foundation off the ground in 1978.

My journey has been inspired by the example of courage and dedication against long odds that these aviators represent.

Throughout my career, I’ve been fortunate to see first-hand the amazing effect the accomplishments and examples set by others can have on the lives of young people. For me, and for many others, the Tuskegee Airmen are just such men.

As a young man, I knew that I had the drive and passion to succeed, and a lot of that came from knowing about what the Tuskegee Airmen did. My father and uncles also served in World War II, and together, all of these brave men gave me a beacon to follow.

Their legacy is not measured in missions flown, nor enemies downed – but in lives touched.

It is because of this legacy that the Tuskegee Airmen will always play an invaluable role in the ongoing accomplishments of our nation's aerospace programs – and in the lives of the young men and women who are writing new chapters in aviation and space history, right now.

To the Tuskegee Airmen in attendance tonight, I say thank you, sincerely, for your service and for the example you continue to set for us all.

To every young person here, I encourage you to walk away tonight with affirmation that education, hard work, determination, and courage can -- and will -- make a difference in all that you can do, and all that you can become. Believe in yourselves; don't let anyone else tell you what you can and cannot do; and always DO YOUR BEST!

Thank you.