

# Soaring over racial barriers:

## El Dorado native, first black commercial pilot to be honored by Little Rock Aviation Academy

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The late Capt. Marlon Green, the El Dorado native who won a landmark Supreme Court case to become the first black pilot to fly for a major airline in the U.S., will be honored today by the Milton P. Crenshaw Aviation Training Academy in Little Rock.

Green will posthumously receive the Courage in Aviation Award during the third annual MPCATC Awards Banquet, which is set for 7 p.m. today at the Kendall Nugent Center of Philander Smith College in Little Rock.

Green's brother, Allen Green of Little Rock, notified the News-Times about the award.

Allen Green will accept the award on his brother's behalf, according to the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.

Marlon Green waged a long and costly court battle after he was rejected by about a dozen commercial air carriers while seeking work as a pilot in 1957.

He had trained as a basic cadet pilot in the Air Force and had left the military at the rank of captain.

Marlon Green sought work as a commercial pilot during a time when passenger airlines in the U.S. had announced that they were ending discriminatory hiring practices and policies.

While completing his application for an airline in Denver, Marlon Green had purposely excluded a photo and any indication of his race.

He was invited for an interview and flight test, but was rejected. He watched as five, less experienced white pilots were hired.

Marlon Green filed a lawsuit under Colorado's anti-discrimination law, launching a six-year battle that would take a professional and personal toll on the pilot.

The case was struck down by the Colorado Supreme Court, but it eventually reached the nation's highest court, and in a watershed moment in 1963, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously in Marlon Green's favor.

He was subsequently offered a job as a pilot by the airline that prompted the lawsuit, and he flew with the carrier from 1965 until he retired in 1978. In 2010, the airline named a Boeing 737 jet after him.

“We turned him down for one reason and one reason only – because of the color of his skin,” Jess Smisek, chief executive officer of then-Continental Airlines, said at the time.

Continental subsequently merged with United Airlines, for which Smisek serves as chairman, president and CEO.

Marlon Green was inducted into the Arkansas Aviation Hall of Fame in 2005.

Details about his life — including his childhood in El Dorado’s Fairview Addition and his hardfought battle to break the color barrier in the U.S. airline industry — form the framework for an the inspirational book, “Turbulence Before Takeoff: The Life and Times of Aviation Pioneer Marlon Green,” which was written by Flint Whitlock, a Pulitzer-nominated author and military historian.

The MPCATA will also double as a 96th Birthday Celebration to honor its namesake, Milton Pitts Crenshaw, one of the original Tuskegee Airmen and the first African American from Arkansas — and one of the first in the country — to be trained by the federal government as a licensed civilian pilot.

Crenshaw trained hundreds of cadet pilots in the 1940s at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. He is credited as being the catalyst behind the first successful flight program at Philander Smith.

Now 96, Crenshaw lives with his daughter in Atlanta and is expected to appear at the banquet and celebration by Internet video conference, the Democrat-Gazette reported.

The MPCATA was founded in 2009 by Willie C. Smith, owner of Smith’s International Airport in Sherrill.

The nonprofit organization aims to provide educational opportunities in aviation and aerospace and to ensure that those opportunities are available to children and young people in underserved communities.

Terrence Bolden is president of the MPCATA.

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