

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jim Tilmon

PERSON

Tilmon, Jim

**Alternative Names:** Jim Tilmon;

**Life Dates:** July 31, 1934-January 16, 2021

**Place of Birth:** Guthrie, Oklahoma, USA

**Residence:** Scottsdale, AZ

**Occupations:** Airplane Pilot; Meteorologist

## Biographical Note

Jim Tilmon, aviation expert, local Emmy-winning newscaster, and accomplished musician, was born on July 31, 1934, in Guthrie, Oklahoma. Tilmon earned his B.A. degree in music from Lincoln University in Missouri, and served in the United States Army Corps of Engineers for eight years, earning the rank of captain.

Tilmon's interest in flying carried him from the U.S. Army to American Airlines in 1965, where he became the airline's third African American commercial pilot and the country's fifth. Tilmon spent twenty-nine years with American Airlines before retiring; his talent earned him the Captain's Chair Award from American Airlines; inspired United Airlines to grant him the title of honorary captain; and compelled the FAA to name an aviator's navigation point after him.

While still piloting aircrafts, Tilmon set another precedent by hosting the first live weekly magazine show developed for and by African Americans. 'Our People,' premiered one week after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Tilmon's guests included notable politicians, artists, and activists, such as Harold Washington, author James Baldwin, and jazz vocalist Johnny Hartman. After four years at WTTW, Tilmon became a weather forecaster and aviation and science reporter at Chicago's NBC affiliate. Tilmon appeared on numerous national programs, including: 'Hardball,' 'NBC Nightly News,' and 'Nightline.'

In addition to his aviation activities, Tilmon stayed involved with music by performing and creating original music for television motion pictures, and other audio and video productions. Tilmon also recorded a symphony- and orchestra-infused relaxation CD, 'Angel Whispers,' in 2003.

Tilmon was awarded a Chicago Emmy in 1974 and was nominated for a National Emmy and the Illinois Associated Press and Illinois United Press International awards for excellence in reporting and broadcasting. In 2002, the Chicago Chapter of National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences presented Tilmon with the Silver Circle Award for twenty-five years in television.

In 1994, Tilmon retired from the airlines and NBC and moved to Arizona, where he continued to do on-air aviation reporting. In 2002, Tilmon returned to Chicago as a weather forecaster and aviation reporter and analyst for the CBS affiliate. In 2004, Tilmon was inducted into the Chicago Senior Citizens Hall of Fame, and was awarded the Luminary Senior Award for his impact on social and cultural life in the City of Chicago.

Tilmon and his wife, Joan Tilmon, raised three children.

Jim Tilmon was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on January 28, 2003.

Tilmon passed away on January 16, 2021.

## Related Entries

**Howard University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Tennessee State University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Lincoln University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Sand Springs High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**WTTV TV** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1962 to 1968]

**Host**

**WMAQ TV** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1993 to 2001]

**Weather Forecaster and Aviation and Science Reporter**

**The Tilmon Group** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**U.S. Army** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1957 to 1965]

**Pilot**

**American Airlines** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1965 to ?]

## **Pilot**

**Plans for Progress Task Force on Youth Motivation** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Your Success Network** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**National Advisory Board for Rachel's Challenge** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]