white contrail streamed across an azure sky. Like a message from his past, the sight of it filled Bill with memories of his childhood in Tuskegee, Ala., and the heroes who had surrounded him there. Their high-flying example had often inspired him to fight through hard times like this.

The Tuskegee Airmen—they were America’s first African American pilots. During World War II, when many people thought African Americans lacked the intelligence, skill, wisdom or courage to fly in combat, they had flocked to the Tuskegee Army Airfield from across the nation and proved their critics wrong. Hundreds had served overseas in World War II with such distinction that their names would go down in history.

Bill had been in the second grade when one of those renowned airmen, the father of his friend Danice James, had returned from Africa. Meeting Daniel “Chappie” James Jr. had changed Bill’s life. Even now, some 20 years later, he could remember the spark of excitement and the vow he’d made after that encounter with the combat pilot who would become the first African American four-star general. “I will fly!” Bill had said. He’d done it too. He’d attended college at Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University) and enrolled in ROTC, taking his pilot qualification exam his senior year. Pilot training in
the military had been challenging. There were still few African American pilots, and racism had reared its ugly head. "I was more distracted from my goal. He'd learned to fly propeller planes, light jets and finally the Dakota, a big plane."

After a temporary duty assignment to Korea for jungle survival school, Bill had been deployed to Vietnam. He had returned home to find his heart and the anger simmering below the surface of his soul. There were still few African American pilots, and racism had reared its ugly head. "I wasn't earning enough to survive," Bill says. "We needed a 33-acre shopping mall," Bill says. "We needed a 33-acre shopping mall." In addition, the U.S. Department of Commerce had declared the whole company. Toward the end of his tenure with IBM, he had no idea where to go.

In his first nonmilitary position, Bill had joined IBM, gone through computer sales training and was put under the watchful eye of a man from the University of Chicago. "It was one of the lowest points in my life," Bill recalls. "I'd been up above the earth. Nothing better than being 40,000 feet in the air. This lifetime of swallowed injustices was eating him alive. He wasn't earning enough to survive, and the stress was giving him stomach problems. What's worse, he felt anger simmering below the surface of his soul. There were still few African American pilots, and racism had reared its ugly head. He wasn't earning enough to survive, and the stress was giving him stomach problems. What's worse, he felt anger simmering below the surface of his soul.

In his first nonmilitary position, Bill had joined IBM, gone through computer sales training and was put under the watchful eye of a man from the University of Chicago. "It was one of the lowest points in my life," Bill recalls. "I'd been up above the earth. Nothing better than being 40,000 feet in the air. This lifetime of swallowed injustices was eating him alive. He wasn't earning enough to survive, and the stress was giving him stomach problems. What's worse, he felt anger simmering below the surface of his soul.

In his first nonmilitary position, Bill had joined IBM, gone through computer sales training and was put under the watchful eye of a man from the University of Chicago. "It was one of the lowest points in my life," Bill recalls. "I'd been up above the earth. Nothing better than being 40,000 feet in the air. This lifetime of swallowed injustices was eating him alive. He wasn't earning enough to survive, and the stress was giving him stomach problems. What's worse, he felt anger simmering below the surface of his soul.

In his first nonmilitary position, Bill had joined IBM, gone through computer sales training and was put under the watchful eye of a man from the University of Chicago. "It was one of the lowest points in my life," Bill recalls. "I'd been up above the earth. Nothing better than being 40,000 feet in the air. This lifetime of swallowed injustices was eating him alive. He wasn't earning enough to survive, and the stress was giving him stomach problems. What's worse, he felt anger simmering below the surface of his soul.

In his first nonmilitary position, Bill had joined IBM, gone through computer sales training and was put under the watchful eye of a man from the University of Chicago. "It was one of the lowest points in my life," Bill recalls. "I'd been up above the earth. Nothing better than being 40,000 feet in the air. This lifetime of swallowed injustices was eating him alive. He wasn't earning enough to survive, and the stress was giving him stomach problems. What's worse, he felt anger simmering below the surface of his soul.

In his first nonmilitary position, Bill had joined IBM, gone through computer sales training and was put under the watchful eye of a man from the University of Chicago. "It was one of the lowest points in my life," Bill recalls. "I'd been up above the earth. Nothing better than being 40,000 feet in the air. This lifetime of swallowed injustices was eating him alive. He wasn't earning enough to survive, and the stress was giving him stomach problems. What's worse, he felt anger simmering below the surface of his soul.