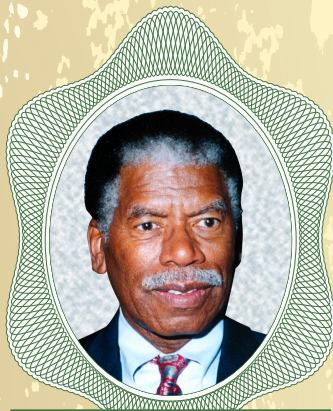


## TRADITIONS:

# 20TH CENTURY TRAILBLAZERS



**CHARLES FORTENBERRY**

**CHARLES E. FORTENBERRY** retired in January 2001, after 42 years with the U.S. Customs Service. At his retirement, Customs employed thousands of African-Americans in its ranks, but when he first started as a Customs Inspector at Chicago O'Hare International Airport, he was one of only a few African-Americans protecting the nation's ports of entry.

In 1964, with the creation the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, African-Americans began receiving the job opportunities they deserved, and the civil service opened up as a legitimate avenue to advancement for all Americans. Soon after, African-Americans who had held low-level positions within American government began to receive assignments and promotions befitting their contributions and potential.

In this new climate, Charles Fortenberry's obvious abilities earned him the post of Liquidation-Inspector at Chicago O'Hare International Airport. In 1967, he was again promoted, this time to an overseas position as the Customs Advisor to Vietnam, a country at that time enduring significant border control issues. After a stint as an Instructor at the Customs National Training Center in New York, Fortenberry again received an overseas assignment, as a Customs Advisor to Ethiopia.

In 1974, he returned to the United States as a Special Assistant Regional Commissioner for the San Francisco Region. In this capacity, Fortenberry instituted a new three-shift schedule for the SECTOR Communications team, which greatly increased efficiency and processing times.

Eight years later, he was promoted to Deputy Assistant Regional Commissioner for the entire Pacific Region, where he served for another seven years. In 1991, Fortenberry became the Chief of Party for the Customs Advisory Team in Egypt. He held several other important overseas and domestic positions within Customs until his retirement in 2001. ■

**JOHN MULZAC** was a remarkable man who led a truly remarkable life. As a young African-American man in living in the segregated Jim Crow era, Mulzac didn't have many opportunities to spread his wings. But when he graduated from the Tuskegee Institute and became a pilot among the original Tuskegee Airmen, he literally took to the skies.

During World War II, the Tuskegee Airmen were the only squadron of fighter pilots that included African-Americans. As John Mulzac recalled, "They said that we could never fly airplanes, were not capable of flying airplanes." But the Tuskegee Airmen proved the critics wrong again and again. Their record of bravery and skill is credited with inspiring President Harry Truman to desegregate the military—an enormous step toward overall societal integration.

Lieutenant Mulzac continued his service after World War II as an Air Force Reservist, and flew missions during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. When he returned home, however, he encountered the harsh realities of segregation that still persisted. Unable to secure a job as a commercial airline pilot due to his race, Lt. Mulzac signed up with the New York Fire Department, again saving American lives.

Ever the pioneer, in 1970 he left the NYFD and joined the first group of U.S. Sky Marshals to protect the skies around the world. After two years in the Sky Marshal program, Lt. Mulzac became the first African-American U.S. Customs Inspector for New York Kennedy Airport's Area Inspection and Control Division. Even in 1972, many passengers did not want to interact with an African-American Customs Inspector, but Lt. Mulzac disarmed their prejudice with his obvious competence and his imperturbable personal charm.

After 21 years in the U.S. Customs Service, John Mulzac retired to focus on his sprawling family. When he passed away in February 2015, he was survived by his wife and their eight children, 22 grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. John Mulzac, or "Daddy John" as his family called him, was a true American hero, military pioneer, and Customs leader. ■



**JOHN MULZAC**

