

Brigadier General Walter J. Whitfield (Class 6A-68)

Walter J. Whitfield was born in Jackson, Mississippi on November 4, 1948. His family migrated to Chicago's West Side when he was 8 years old. He graduated from high school in 1966 and took classes at the City College of Chicago working toward an Engineering Science Major while he looked for work. After a year of being unable to find steady employment, Whitfield joined the Army in 1967.

He was commissioned upon completion of the Field Artillery Officer Candidate School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He left active duty in 1971 and in 1973, he returned to the armed forces joining the Illinois National Guard in Chicago.

He served in a variety of positions and assignments of increasing responsibility and attained the rank of Brigadier General and command of the 33rd Separate Infantry Brigade in 1992. He earned an MS in Military Art and Science from the US Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Whitfield was the first African American to be federally recognized and confirmed by the United States Senate as a Brigadier General.

As Deputy State Area Commander in Illinois, he provided leadership for over 22,000 Illinois National Guard women and men. As the senior federally recognized General Officer in the State, Whitfield was instrumental in developing the Illinois National Guard state mission statement and establishing training goals that would ensure the guard would be able to perform its duties.

His decorations include the Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal and the Joint Service Commendation Medal.