

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lt. Col. Charles Dryden

PERSON

Dryden, Charles W. (Charles Walter)

Alternative Names: Lt. Col. Charles Dryden;

Life Dates: September 16, 1920-June 24, 2008

Place of Birth: New York, New York, USA

Residence: Atlanta, Georgia

Occupations: Tuskegee Airman

Biographical Note

Tuskegee Airman Charles W. Dryden was born on September 16, 1920, in New York City to Jamaican parents who were educators. Dryden graduated from Peter Stuyvesant High School and earned his B.A. degree in political science from Hofstra University and his M.A. degree in public law and government from Columbia University. In 1996, he was awarded an honorary degree of doctor of humane letters by Hofstra University.

In August 1941, Dryden was selected for aviation cadet training at the Tuskegee Army Flying School in Alabama. He was commissioned on April 29, 1942 as a second lieutenant in a class of only three graduates, which was the second class of black pilots to graduate in the history of the U.S. Army Air Corps. Upon completing his training, Dryden was named a member of the famed 99th Pursuit Squadron, and later the 332 Fighter Group, which served in North Africa, Sicily and Italy during World War II. On June 9, 1943, Lt. "A-Train" (his P-40 nickname) led a flight of six pilots engaging enemy fighter aircraft in aerial combat over Pantelleria, Sicily. It was the first time in aviation history that black American pilots of the U.S. Army Air Corps engaged aircraft in combat.

Following the war, Dryden served as a professor of air science at Howard University and retired in 1962 as a command pilot with 4,000 hours flying time. A member of the board of directors of the Georgia Aviation Hall of Fame, he also is a member of the Atlanta Metro Lions Club, Quality Living Services (a senior citizens' organization) and the Atlanta Chapter-Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. (ACTAI), which he helped found in 1978 and which he served as president, vice president and national convention committee chairman in 1980 and 1995. He has been inducted into the Honorable Orders of the Daedalians, the Kentucky Colonels and the Palmetto Gentlemen of South Carolina. In 1998, Colonel Dryden was inducted into the Georgia Aviation Hall of Fame. His

autobiography was published by the University of Alabama Press in 1997 entitled A-Train: Memoirs of a Tuskegee Airman. He was designated an Outstanding Georgia Citizen by the Secretary of State in 1997.

Dryden has three sons, by a former marriage. His wife, Marymal Morgan Dryden, has three sons and a daughter, also by a former marriage. Between them they have five grandchildren. They have made Atlanta their home.

Dryden passed away on June 24, 2008 at the age of 87.

Dryden was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on September 20, 2004.

Related Entries

United States Army Air Corps [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1992 to 1994]

Pilot

Howard University [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1999 to 2002]

Professor of Air Science