

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lt. Col. Charles Dryden

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Dryden, Charles W. (Charles Walter)
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Charles Dryden,
Dates:	September 20, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:39:50).
Abstract:	Tuskegee airman Lt. Col. Charles Dryden (1920 - 2008) was named a member of the famed 99th Pursuit Squadron, and later the 332 Fighter Group, which served in the Mediterranean during World War II. Dryden led a flight of six pilots engaging enemy fighter aircrafts 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 aircrafts in combat. Dryden was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 20, 2004, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_169
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

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.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lt. Col. Charles Dryden was conducted by Jodi Merriday on September 20, 2004, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Tuskegee airman Lt. Col. Charles Dryden (1920 - 2008) was named a member of the famed 99th Pursuit Squadron, and later the 332 Fighter Group, which served in the Mediterranean during World War II. Dryden led a flight of six pilots engaging enemy fighter aircrafts 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 aircrafts in combat.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Dryden, Charles W. (Charles Walter)

Merriday, Jodi (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Dryden, Charles W. (Charles Walter)--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. Army Air Forces. Fighter Group, 332nd.

Occupations:

Tuskegee Airman

HistoryMakers® Category:

MilitaryMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Charles Dryden, September 20, 2004. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Charles Dryden, Section A2004_169_001_001, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Lt. Col. Charles Dryden was born in New York, New York on September 16, 1920. His mother, Violet Buckley Dryden, was born in in 1891. His father, Charles Levy Tucker Dryden, was born in 1889. They met and courted in their home country, Jamaica. When his father joined World War I in 1918 as part of the Jamaican Expeditionary Force, his mother moved to New York City to live with her father. The couple married in 1919. Dryden's mother was gentle while his father was stern; they both raised him and his two siblings with principles of respect for others. Dryden grew up surrounded by his maternal family and maternal grandfather, who admired British royalty and culture. His interest in flying started early when an aunt gave him a model airplane. Dryden attended P.S. 46 for elementary school and excelled in math and English. He became acquainted with African American history after moving to Tuskegee, Alabama, to join the U.S. Army Air Corps, and he contrasts the history of slavery in Jamaica to that in the U.S.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Charles Dryden, Section A2004_169_001_002, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Lt. Col. Charles Dryden and his siblings were first raised in Manhattan, New York, New York where Dryden attended P.S. 46 for elementary school, then Edward W. Stitt Junior High School. They moved to the Bronx in 1936 while Dryden was enrolled at the prestigious Peter Stuyvesant High School where he joined the aviation club, excelled in his academics and graduated early. He began his undergraduate studies in mechanical engineering at The City College of New York, but the challenge of being too young for college negatively impacted his academics. Dryden left college to join the U.S. Air Force and enter World War II. After returning from the Korean War, Dryden attended night and summer classes at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York and earned his B.A. degree in political science at the age of thirty-five. He recalls the role models in his neighborhood, the strong influence of his pastor at St. Augustine Presbyterian Church, his lifelong desire to fly planes and his first encounter with racism in school.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Charles Dryden, Section A2004_169_001_003, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Lt. Col. Charles Dryden completed the Civilian Pilot Training Program sponsored by the U.S. government and earned his pilot's license as an undergraduate at The City College of New York in the late 1930s. In 1941, he was selected for aviation cadet training at Tuskegee Army Flying School in Tuskegee, Alabama. He entered World War II as a member of the 99th Pursuit Squadron, the first all-black fighter squadron, commanded by Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., and later joined the 332 Fighter Group. In 1952, after returning from the Korean War, Dryden was stationed at Mitchel Field in Long Island and earned his B.A. degree in political science from Hofstra University. Encouraged by a colleague, he pursued and obtained a master's degree in public law and government from Columbia University in New York City. Dryden recalls his time at Tuskegee, his mentors there and learning to take charge as an officer. He also talks about his family, earning the title of colonel and his honorary

doctorate degree from Hofstra.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Charles Dryden, Section A2004_169_001_004, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Lt. Col. Charles Dryden joined the U.S. Air Force in 1941 as part of the prestigious all-black Tuskegee Airmen. Dryden encountered racism and segregation while stationed at Walterboro Army Airfield in Walterboro, South Carolina. His anger at being discriminated against while fighting to serve his country led him to fly planes in a manner prohibited outside of war zones. He was court-martialed twice for these actions, but acquitted of one charge and lightly punished for another. He continued to serve until he retired in 1962 and began working at Pepsi-Cola and continued there when it became PepsiCo, Inc. After four years he left and his subsequent positions were executive director for Presbyterian Economic Development Corporation (PEDCO); assistant to the president of Martins Jamaica, a travel company in Jamaica; and working with organizations that helped addicts and single mothers. He shares his best experience in the military and his most disappointing one as well as memories of military traditions.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Charles Dryden, Section A2004_169_001_005, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Lt. Col. Charles Dryden left Pepsico, Inc. in 1968 when he saw the company doing little to advance its highly qualified workers and knew he needed to leave to maintain his integrity. He worked in the personnel department at Lockheed Martin, in Atlanta, Georgia from 1975 to 1988 where he often gave advice to aspiring young African American employees. Dryden published 'A-Train: Memoirs of a Tuskegee Airman' in 1997. He describes the process of writing, publishing, and promoting his book. He also describes the basis of his planned books for the future and several anecdotes that he hopes to incorporate in them. Dryden reflects upon the modern generation and the introduction to his book 'Thank God, I'm not Young'. He hopes to be remembered for his emphasis on raising children to be responsible and caring adults.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Charles Dryden, Section A2004_169_001_006, TRT: 0:11:50 ?

Lt. Col. Charles Dryden narrates his photographs.