

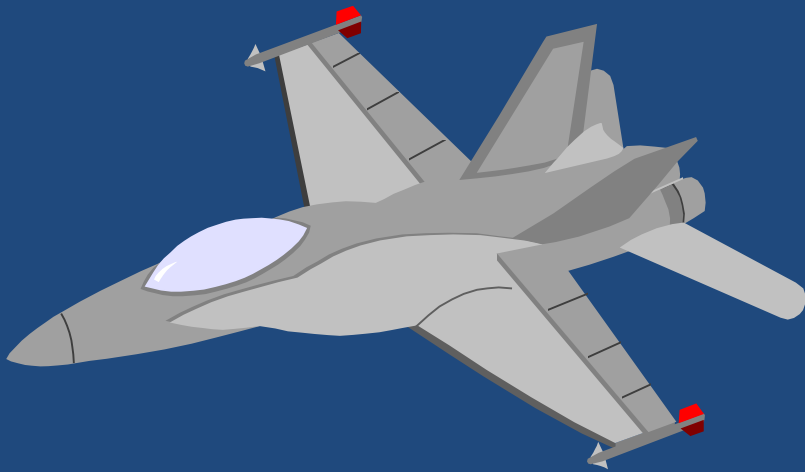
# Hofstra's Own Tuskegee Airman

Presented by the Hofstra University Archives

# Introduction

Although the Tuskegee Experiment was instituted by the Air Force and the pilots trained at an air force base, the officers and the men they graduated were not always viewed as equal to other pilots, or other men. That is because they were black. Until President Truman signed Executive Order #9981 on July 26, 1948 the armed forces were segregated.

This is the story of one Tuskegee airman,  
Lt. Col. Charles Dryden.



- Who were the Tuskegee airmen?
- Who was Charles Dryden and what is his relationship to Hofstra University?

# Charles W. Dryden

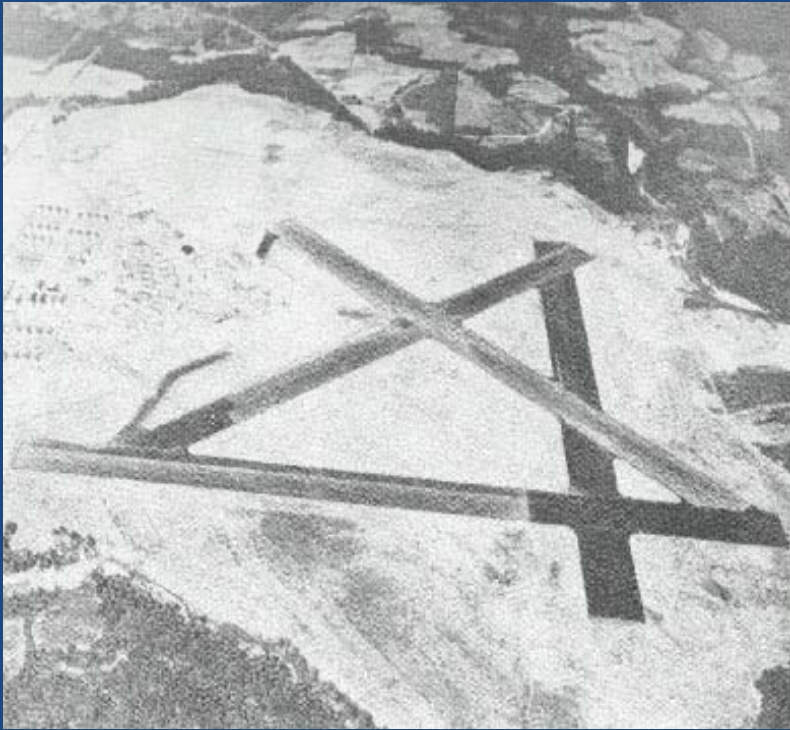
Charles Dryden was born in New York on Sept. 16, 1920. His parents, “Rob” and Violet had been teachers in Jamaica. During World War I “Rob” was a sergeant in the Jamaican Expeditionary Force. Charles Dryden’s hobby from childhood was building model airplanes.



# Spring 1941

In the beginning, there were six black cadets enrolled in the Air Corps Technical Training School. They were to be trained in three technical specialties and then assigned to the 99th Pursuit Squadron which was to begin classes in June of 1941. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, five cadets were transferred to the Tuskegee Army Air Field.

# Where is Tuskegee?



This is the air field, in photo, from 8,000 feet.

Located near Tuskegee, Alabama, the Tuskegee Institute along with several other institutions had been selected in 1941 to offer a Civilian Pilot Training Program to black college students. This “experimental” program would eventually see 992 black military aviators become part of history.

# The First Lady goes for a ride:



When Eleanor Roosevelt visited the Tuskegee Institute on April 19, 1941, many people (including herself) were not convinced that black pilots could fly airplanes. After taking a ride with “Chief” Anderson, however, the Institute was chosen as the site for the first Black Air Corps pilots to be trained and eventually to be sent to participate in World War II.



# Special Orders:

Charles Dryden wanted to fly airplanes since he was a child. With his assignment to Tuskegee Institute in hand, he could make that dream a reality.

UNITED STATES ARMY  
HEADQUARTERS SOUTHERN NEW YORK RECRUITING DISTRICT  
39 Whitehall Street, New York, N. Y.

August 19, 1941

(SPECIAL ORDERS )  
NUMBER 177 )

- E X T R A C T -

9. Pursuant to authority contained in letter, The Adjutant General's Office, dated August 5, 1941 (File AG 221.99-Aviation Cadets), Aviation Cadet CHARLES W. DRYDEN 12032421 having been enlisted this date for assignment to Air Corps Flying School, Tuskegee, Alabama will proceed from New York, N. Y. to Tuskegee, Ala. reporting upon arrival thereof to the Officer in Charge, Aviation Cadet Detachment, not later than 1:00 P.M. August 23, 1941. Aviation Cadet grubee a four (4) day delay enroute.

It being impracticable for the Government to furnish cooking facilities for rations, the Finance Department will pay in advance to Aviation Cadet Charles W. Dryden the monetary travel allowance prescribed in paragraph 3a, AR 35-2580, dated September 30, 1933, at the rate of one dollar (\$1.00) per day for one (1) man for one (1) day.

The Quartermaster Corps will furnish the necessary transportation and the entire cost of this journey is chargeable to procurement authority FD 1413 P 3-06 & 0410-2.

The travel directed is necessary in the military service. Travel by privately owned conveyance is authorized, if desired.

By order of Lieut. Colonel DICE:

F. G. RUSSE,  
1st Lieut., Infantry  
Asst. Rotg. Officer

F. G. RUSSE,  
1st Lieut., Infantry  
Asst. Rotg. Officer

1941 The aviation cadet will be last rationed to include supper Aug. 23, and will leave station at 6:00 P.M., August 19, 1941.  
MONETARY ALLOWANCE IN LIEU OF RATIONS NOT PAID IN ADVANCE AT THIS STATION.

DISTRIBUTION:  
C. in C., Avn Cdt Det. (6)  
FD, Washington DC. (1)  
Supply Sct. (1)  
Avn. Cdt. concerned, (1)  
File.

F. G. RUSSE,  
1st Lieut., Infantry  
Asst. Rotg. Officer



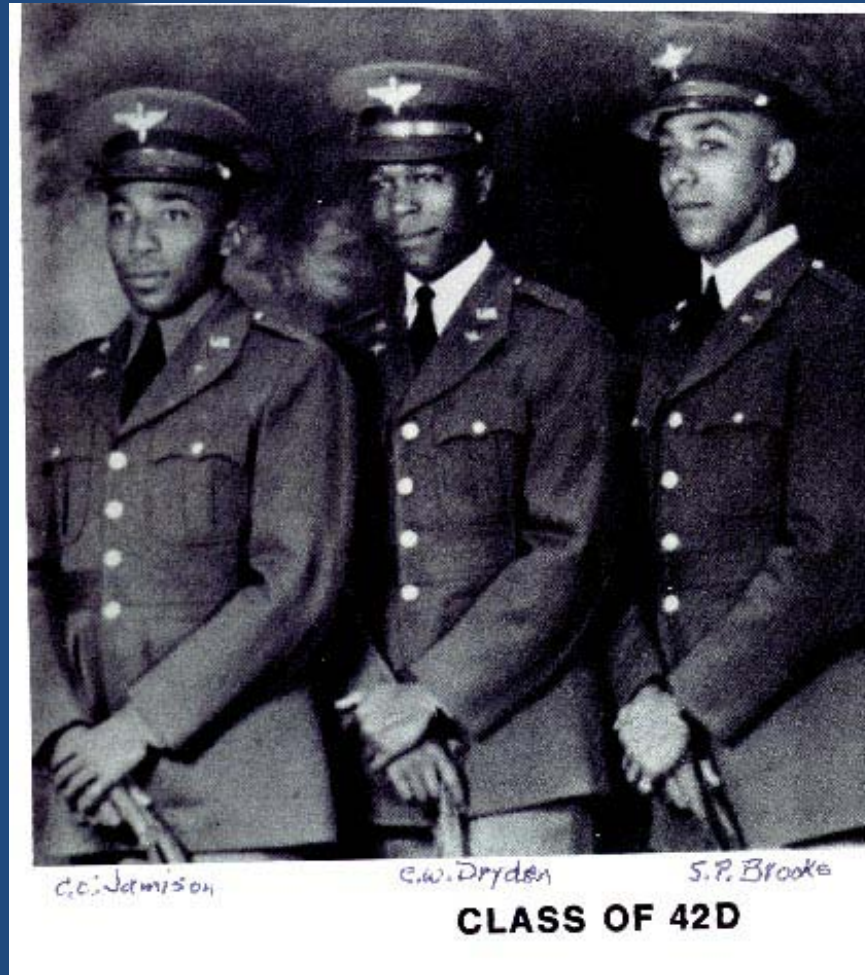
# Ready to Fly!

This photo of Charles Dryden was taken on April 29, 1942. As a brand new 2nd Lieutenant he was part of the second class to finish Aviation Cadet training. The classes were given numerical and alpha designations determined by year of completion and order of graduation, his class was designated the 42-D class.



In 1943, *The Journal and Guide*, ran a story about “the best negro combat pilots.” Charles Dryden was named to the list which included 8 other pilots. Here he is pictured with his plane, nicknamed “A - Train.” Dryden states in his book, that he suggested the name because of the Duke Ellington song. As a New Yorker, the name also conjures images of the 8th Ave. subway express!





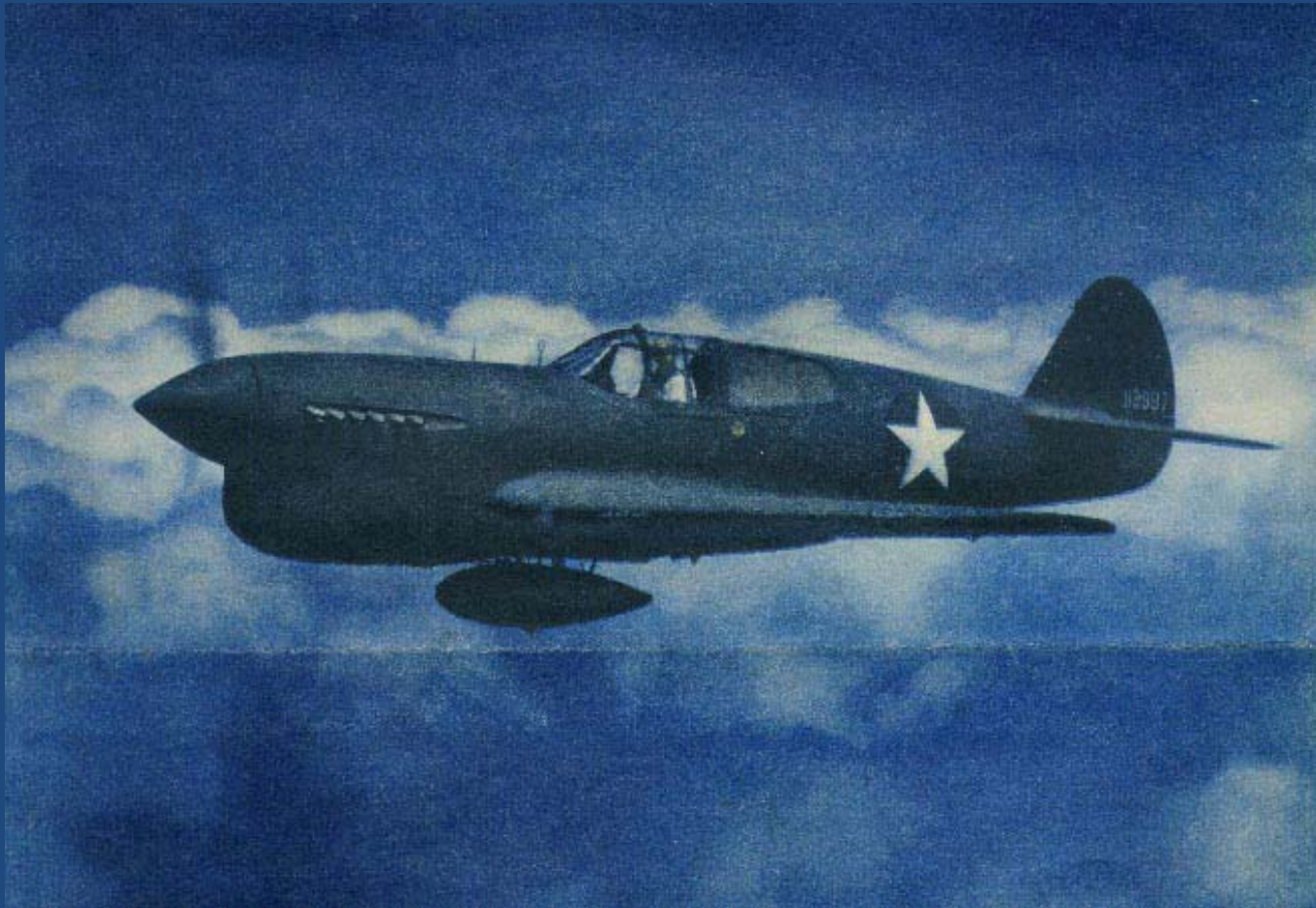
The Class of 42-D, Clarence C. Jamison, Dryden, and Sidney P. Brooks, all 2nd Lieutenants.



# The original pilots of the 99th Pursuit Squadron

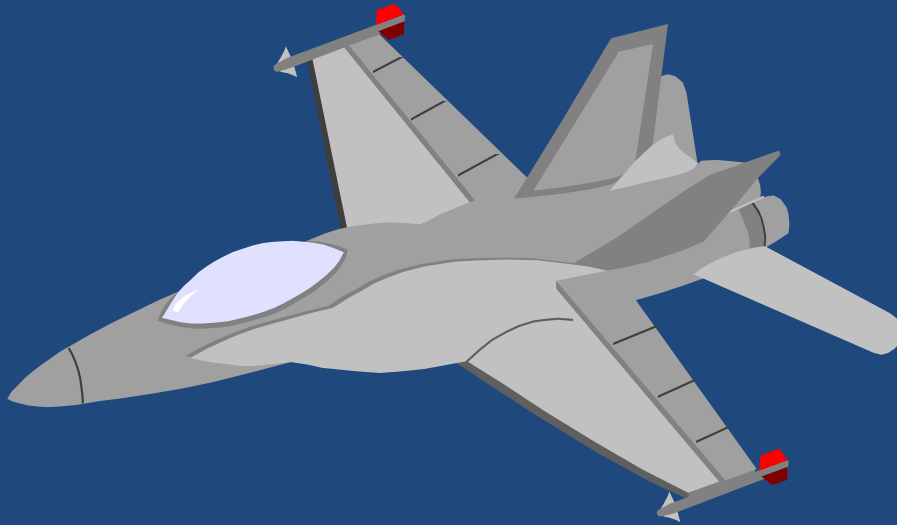


This photo was taken at the Tuskegee Army Air Field, March 1943.



The Curtiss Warhawks, known as the P-40 F, were flown by the 99th Pursuit squadron as fighter-bombers under the command of Lt. Col. Benjamin O. Davis.

# Involvement in World War:



After intensive training the black pilots wondered when they would be needed overseas. Lt. Dryden was shipped to North Africa in April of 1943. There the pilots of the Tuskegee “experiment” waited to see what their contribution would be.



Roberts saw the planes pouncing, looking with their pale point against the bright sky like white pulls of ack-ack. He wheeled and the rest of the flight wheeled with him, but they had been taken off balance, and it was impossible to maintain company front against the Germans, who were coming down in loose formations of two at 450 miles an hour.

The P-40 is a comparatively slow plane and its fighting has to be defensive, because the Messerschmitt, with its superior speed, can pick the angle and time of attack. But the P-40 has one great advantage: it can make tighter turns. The flight yanked hard on their controls and turned into the German onslaught.

Dryden, after his turn, found himself far out beyond the edge of the melee, with the bombers passing sedately 5,000 feet above his head. So he roared up above them and then dove down across the tail of the formation, spraying them as he went, and continued right down into the dog-fight below.

Three of the P-40s were making a lubberly, a slow, spiraling circle in which each plane protects the other's tail. From that defensive circle, like covered wagons gathered around a square against Indians on the plains, the defenders can shoot out as the enemy speeds around on the outside. Dryden shook a Focke-Wulf on his tail and smugged into the lubberly, circling, firing his guns as the Germans flicked across his sights.

Leo Rayford was having troubles of his own. Two FWs kept at him, and when he turned into one, the other would get a burst in at him. One burst hit and his right wing shuddered as a 20-mm. cannon shell exploded there. Rayford was fighting grimly, taking the long gamble against the two Germans, when Spann Watson appeared on his wing from nowhere. Watson opened up at long range. He hit the outside German, and the two planes broke away out of the fight.

At the initial turn Willie Ashley's plane had gone into a spin and he'd lost considerable alti-

# Negro Fighters' First Battle

**It was just a routine engagement between P-40s and German planes before the invasion of Sicily but it was a historic event—the first time Americans of this race met the enemy in aerial warfare.**

tude. When he pulled out, he started spiraling up to rejoin the others. Suddenly ahead of him he saw another plane on the loose. He edged in to investigate. It was a Focke-Wulf.

Ashley got in good and close before letting go with his entire works. He saw that his tracers were going too far in front, so he cut down on the lead until he saw the tracers hitting home. He sprayed the German from end to end, and it began a long smoking glide toward the sea.

The pilot followed the falling German plane as far as he dared, but the air behind him was still full of machine-gun fire and spitting planes. He wheeled and climbed to make sure there was no one on his tail, and when he looked down

once more there was no sign of the German. Ashley climbed to rejoin his flight.

The six American planes spiraled in formidable porcupine formation, and the German fighters left off and sailed toward Italy. Meanwhile the jittery enemy bombers had jettisoned their loads into the sea, without attempting a run over the island, and were making for home.

Once again the P-40s joined company front, flying wing to wing in extended horizontal order, and resumed their patrol over Pantelleria. A few minutes later they were relieved and headed for home, flying below the formation of Spitfires coming out to carry on the daylight vigil over the island.

## June 9, 1943

An historic day, as six American P-40 's engage in hostilities over Pantelleria, Sicily. All six of the planes were from the 99th Pursuit Squadron. Charles Dryden was the first pilot to engage in the conflict and it is the first time in our history that black aviators had been involved in aerial combat. Only two of our planes sustained any damage.

## Aftermath :

After performing 200 escort missions, during which not one bomb was lost to enemy aircraft, the men of the 99th were sent to different locales. Dryden and several others ended up in Selfridge Field in Michigan. The morale of the black officers was at an all-time low.

# Direct Orders

During his stay at Selfridge, Dryden was an officer. However, black officers were not given equal access to the Officers Club. After being denied access, different groups of black officers staged a continuous defiance of their commanding officer by asking to be given permission to enter the club. Since a war was still being waged, such disobedience could have been interpreted as treason, which was punishable by death. After five days, the commanding officers' response? Close the Officers Club.

# The Ultimate Insult: Walterboro, South Carolina

The injustices aimed at the black aviators, officers, and enlisted men continued from 1944-1948. Movie theaters, dining facilities, barracks, and other areas were off-limits, or segregated. The ultimate insult occurred when German Prisoners of War, noticeable by the white letters "PW" on the back of their fatigues were given access to the "white" side of the cafeteria, while black aviators and officers could not enter.

Charles Dryden continued his military career with stays in Kentucky, Ohio, and California, then trained at Communications Officers School in Indiana. After graduation in 1950, he was assigned to Japan. At first considered a “cushy” assignment, the invasion of South Korea and attack on American troops stationed there, led to the start of war. Captain Dryden was once again assigned to fly, this time an AT-6.



Sgt. “Irish” Hanrahan and Capt. Dryden  
at Yokota Air Base, Japan.





COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES

Sunday, June 12, 1955

at 4 o'clock

Dryden had begun his college education at City College. Under a program called "Operation Bootstrap," Dryden, although still in the military, was assigned to Mitchel Field in Hempstead, NY. He was able to take the required college courses to complete his B.A. degree in Political Science. He graduated from Hofstra in 1955.



Major Charles Dryden is suited up to fly a T-33 Jet trainer at Mitchel Air Force Base, NY. This photo was taken in 1956, one year after receiving his Hofstra diploma. Mitchel AFB was located where Hofstra's North Campus now stands.

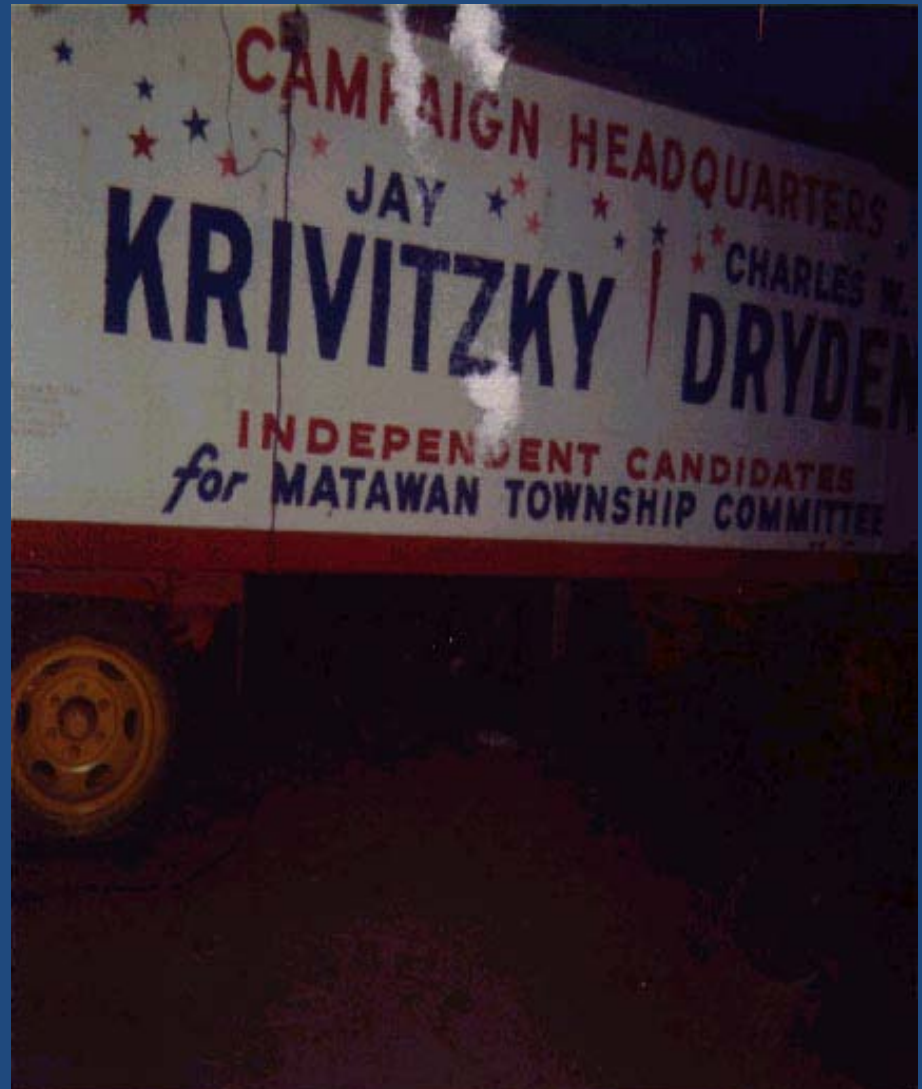


Lt. Col. Charles Dryden continued to achieve during his military career. He received an MA from Columbia University in 1957, went overseas to serve under Brigadier General Benjamin O. Davis in Germany from 1957-59, and was a Professor at Howard University from 1959-61 teaching Air Science.



After a 21 year career, Lt. Col. Charles Dryden retired. In this photo, Brigadier General James B. Tipton says good-bye from his office at Washington Air Defense Sector, Fort Lee, Virginia, August 31, 1962.

In 1963 Dryden ran for Committeeman in Matawan Township in New Jersey. He served with Jay Krivitzky until 1965. Photo of campaign truck, at right.



# Reunion



“Chief” Charles Anderson, the pilot who had taken First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt on that historic flight, and Lt.Col. Charles Dryden in 1993 at Moton Field, Tuskegee, Alabama.



Lt. Col. Charles Dryden Received an Honorary Degree from Hofstra University in December of 1996.

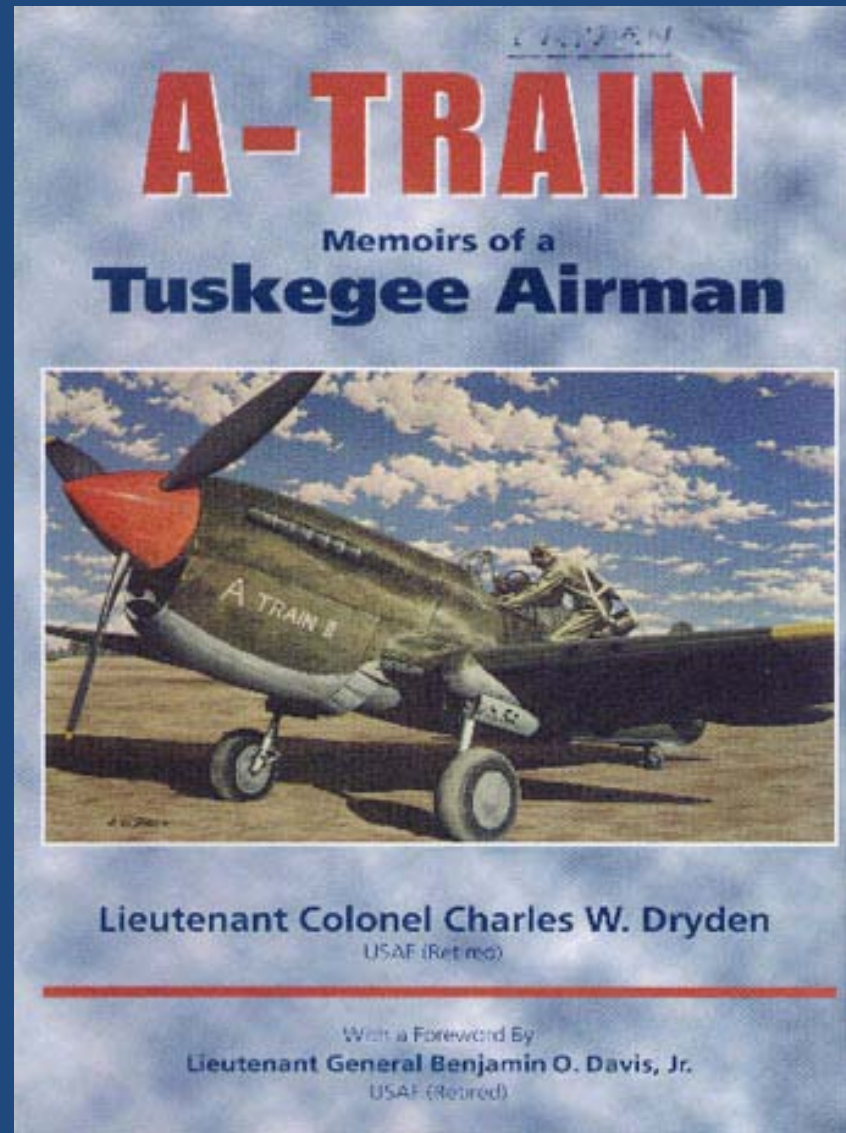






Lt. Col. Dryden in 1997, with model of his World War II P-40 airplane, the "A-Train."

To read  
more about  
Lt. Col.  
Charles  
Dryden:



Hofstra's University Archives maintains Lt. Col. Dryden's papers. The collection can be used in our reading room. The Department is located in the Joan & Donald E. Axinn Library, Room 032. Please contact us at: (516) 463-6407 for an appointment or additional information.