

# Hundreds pay last respects to Tuskegee Airman

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*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

Published on: 07/02/08

Hundreds gave Tuskegee Airman Lt. Col. Chuck Dryden a final send off into the heavens Tuesday.

Relatives, friends and other admirers gathered at Cascade United Methodist Church in southwest Atlanta to say their final goodbyes to the World War II fighter pilot who helped break down racial barriers in the U.S. military.



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Attendees from Murray Brothers Funeral Home wait with Tuskegee Airman Lt. Col. Charles W. 'Chuck' Dryden's casket following his funeral at Cascade United Methodist Church in Southwest Atlanta.

Dryden — nicknamed "A-Train" — was a member of one of the most successful squadrons in American history and was one of the first African-Americans to lead a squadron into battle.

Members of his all-black 99th fighter squadron flew more than 15,000 missions and were in high demand because of their bomber escort safety record.

Dryden died June 24 at age 87 after a short illness. The Air Force retiree's farewell on Tuesday included a flyover and military honors.



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Marymal Dryden is escorted to her limo following the funeral for her husband Tuskegee Airman Lt. Col. Charles W. 'Chuck' Dryden on Tuesday.

Andrew Young, former Atlanta mayor and U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, sought to put Dryden's accomplishments in historical context during the service, which also drew a slew of dignitaries including U.S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) and Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin.

Dryden is part of a long line of African-Americans, from Crispus Attucks to Jesse Owens and others, who helped shape American history while living in times of discrimination, Young noted. He said God used these "stones that the builders rejected" and made them cornerstones of change.

With a humor and emotion, Eric Dryden offered remembrances of his father and their time spent together, especially flying. Growing up, it never occurred to him that most dads don't fly and that he was part of aviation royalty.

"I thank you for being my father and I thank God for letting me be your wing man," the younger Dryden said.

Speakers included Col. Clarence Jamison Sr., who along with Dryden in 1942 was in the second class of cadets to graduate from flight training at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

Jamison, 90, of Shaker Heights, Ohio, called Dryden "the best friend I ever had."

"I salute you, buddy. See you soon. Bye," said Jamison. He is the last living member of that class, a status that earned him a bucket of champagne Tuesday based on a long-standing pact with Dryden and a third classmate.

Dryden, a First Congregational Church member and a retiree of Lockheed Martin's Marietta facility, won praise for his willingness to mentor and to share his story with students and civic groups. Among those he inspired is Reto Smith Jr., a Martin Luther King Jr. High School graduate.

"It really hits close to home," said Smith, 18, an Aviation Career Enrichment program participant who leaves soon for the U.S. Naval Academy.