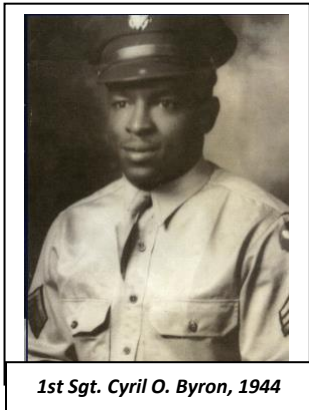


BIOGRAPHY

A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

TUSKEGEE AIRMEN INC. PUBLIC RELATIONS, P.O. Box 830060
TUSKEGEE, AL 36083

CYRIL OSBOURNE BYRON, Sr. Ed.D. 1920 - 2015



1st Sgt. Cyril O. Byron, 1944

Cyril Osbourne Byron, Sr. was born on April 15, 1920 in the Bronx, NY to Cyril and Blanch Byron, who were originally from Jamaica, British West Indies. The fourth of six children, his siblings were Alma, Vernon, Blanch, Gladys, and Grace. Cyril attended public schools in the Bronx, graduating from Morris High School. His parents always stressed the importance of education for Black people in the United States, and his father taught him a phrase he often repeated when faced with discrimination throughout his life: “Don’t resent what you can’t prevent.”

Cyril entered Morgan State College (later University) in Baltimore, MD in the early 1940’s. An outstanding athlete in high school, Cyril was awarded letters in basketball, football, and track & field at Morgan, where he met his future wife, Freda Jefferson, at his Freshman Class Meeting. He was drafted after completing his sophomore year, and was one of the first two students to leave Morgan for WW II.

In the Army, Cyril was sent to Camp Upton, NY for Basic Training. He was then assigned to the 99th Pursuit Squadron and sent to Tuskegee Army Air Field, AL. The name of his unit was changed to the 99th Fighter Squadron. His unit was transferred to New York, where the men boarded the SS Mariposa for an eight-day, unescorted trip to Casablanca, North Africa in April of 1943. Cyril later recalled that he was seasick for six of those eight days.

He was originally assigned as an armorer, but when it was discovered in Casablanca that he knew how to type, he was transferred to Headquarters, where he later taught others to type. His first assignment was to type the duty rosters for kitchen police, guard duty, and barracks maintenance. He later said he made sure his name never appeared on those rosters. The unit moved across North Africa to Cape Bon, then on to Sicily, the invasion of Salerno, Foggia, and Rametelli, Italy. Initially assigned to the 15th Air Force, the unit was transferred to the 8th Air Force with the arrival of the 332nd Fighter Group in Italy and was joined by the 99th Fighter Squadron in Rametelli for the remainder of Cyril’s tour of duty.

The Headquarters Unit returned to the U.S. in June of 1945. Cyril and Freda eloped to Atlantic City, NJ on July 10, 1945, and he was honorably discharged in September, 1945. That same month, he reentered Morgan State College, graduating in 1947 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry. Unable to secure employment as a research chemist, he eventually joined the New York City Port Authority, attending New York University at night. He earned his Master’s degree in Science Education thanks to the GI Bill.

Cyril next taught chemistry and mathematics, and then became Assistant Football Coach at Fort Valley State College (GA). In 1953, he joined the faculty at Coppin State College (MD) where he taught chemistry, physical sciences, and mathematics. He eventually headed the Science Department at Coppin

State and became Associate Dean of Evening and Summer School, President of the Faculty Senate, and Dean of Education. He coached the basketball team and served at one point as Director of Athletics. He was sworn in on the Baltimore City School Board in 1970. He earned his Doctorate in Science Education in 1974 from Temple University. In 1976, Cyril became Associate Dean of Science and Mathematics at Baltimore City Community College. After retirement, he returned to Baltimore City Community College as Associate Athletic Director, a role he held until 1991.

A “three-letter man” at Morgan State, Cyril also spent much of his life in the sports world as a coach, administrator, and official. He served 28 years with the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA) and the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC), and 7 years with the East Coast National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). He scouted college officials for the National Football League (NFL) for 7 years, and was the first black referee in Division 1 NCAA Football. He was inducted as a charter member into the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) Officiating Hall of Fame in 1994.

A member of the Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Cyril received many accolades for his volunteer service in the community during his lifetime. He was among the East Coast Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen Inc. DOTAs honored by President Bush in 2007 at the Tuskegee Airmen Congressional Gold Medal Award Ceremony at the U.S. Capitol. He was also proudly in attendance at both inaugurations of President Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012.

Cyril died on October 20, 2015 and requested that his body be donated to science. He and Freda, who died in 1987 after 42½ years of marriage, had two sons, Jeffrey and Cyril, Jr. They were also blessed with two daughters-in law, Rose Mary and Marsha, and four grandchildren: Jada, Justin, Jason, and Jeremy. A longtime member of the Episcopal Church of the Holy Trinity, Cyril attributed his success and many achievements to strong family ties and spiritual faith. He had a wonderful sense of humor and never missed an opportunity to say with a laugh “My name is Bennett, and I’m not in it!”

MILITARY LOCATIONS / ASSIGNMENTS AWARDS

Camp Upton, NY
Tuskegee Army Air Field AL

CAMPAIGNS / WARS

WW II

MILITARY AWARDS / DECORATIONS

European-African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal
World War II Victory Medal
National Defense Service Medal
Air Force Distinguished Unit Citation
American Campaign Medal

CIVILIAN AWARDS / HONORS

Congressional Gold Medal (awarded collectively)



Cyril O. Byron, Sr. at age 93