

Benjamin Oliver Davis Jr.

By Alex

This is a story of a 12-year-old Black boy who lives in New York in the early 1970's and wants to be a U.S. pilot for wars. Although he knows he has what it takes to be a pilot he is afraid that he won't be accepted because he is black so he mails his Uncle Jake the following letter, explaining his fears.

5/11/1971

Dear Uncle Jake,

Hi! I mailed you this letter to ask you about my problem. I want to join the U.S. Air Corps when I grow up, but this white kid in my class named Fred said that Blacks can't join the Air Corps, only white people can. I told him that he was wrong, that my uncle knew blacks that were in it and he said that I was a liar. Did you really know black people in the Air Corps? Was it hard for them and you, due to prejudice? I need an answer immediately.

Sincerely,
Will

5/18/1971

Dear William,

How are you doing? To answer your question, yes I did know black people in the Air Corps. Yes, the white people were prejudiced against me while I was in the Army. Even though there was prejudice, I made many good friends. One in particular, Benjamin Oliver Davis, Jr. was a true friend. I think his story might be interesting to you. If you want to know more, let me know and I will tell you more.

Sincerely,
Uncle Jake

5/22/1971

Dear Uncle Jake,

I would love to hear more of your army buddy. I think that I have heard of him. Was he in World War II? Please tell me more. Also, if you know a way to make my sister quit and stop driving me insane please tell me.

Your soon to be insane nephew,
Will

5/27/1971

Dear William,

I'm glad you want to hear about Ben Davis Jr. Yes, he was in World War II but I knew him before the war began. Also, he wasn't really what you would call an army buddy. He was my commanding officer when I was a foot soldier. Even then, before he was very famous, he had endured much prejudice. Ben was born December 18, 1912 in Washington, D.C. The only other thing he told us about his childhood was that his dad paid a pilot to give him an airplane ride. Ben attended West Point, graduating 35th out of 276 cadets in 1936. He was the fourth Black man to graduate in West Point history and the first one in fifty years. His time at West Point was very lonely, he ate all his meals alone, had no company, and the other officers, all of whom were white, would not speak to him. He said that he wasn't going to be driven out by anybody. Immediately, after he graduated from West Point, he applied to the U.S. Air Corps, but he was denied admission because Blacks were not allowed to be in the Air Corps at that time. Two weeks later, he married Agatha Scott in the Cadet Chapel. It was then that I met him at Ft. Benning, Georgia where he was commander of a Black service company. I would love to tell you more but I need to go on a trip soon that I must start packing for immediately. I'll write you again as soon as I can.

Love,
Uncle Jake

P.S.: Try bribing, blackmailing, or sitting on Cassie to make her stop.

6/19/1971

Dear Uncle Jake,

I hope that your trip went well. Where did you go? My younger sister is pestering me as always, even though I followed your advice. I am doing well at school, but Fred is still making fun my dream of being in the Air Corps. So getting back to Ben and his story, how long were you two together at Fort Benning? One last thing, when I heard about Ben, it was because he had done something that I can't remember and they mentioned that he was in World War II as a pilot. I think I heard it in 1970 in a newspaper or overheard people talking about it. Isn't his father also well known? Write me back when you can.

Yours truly,
Will

6/26/1971

Dear William,

My trip did go well, thank you for asking. I'm sorry that Cassie and Fred are bugging you. To answer your first question, I went on that trip to visit your grandfather in Philadelphia. To answer your next question, Ben and I were at Fort Benning together for a year. After that, he was sent to infantry school where he faced the exact same prejudice from the white classmates. When he graduated in 1940, he and many other blacks fought their way into the air corps, all of which segregated Blacks. In 1941, he was in one of the first blacks to be admitted into the air corps and started pilot training. Ben was assigned to the 99th squadron and graduated with the first class of pilots in March 7, 1942. In 1942, the 99th (also known as the Tuskegee Air Men) flew its first mission with Ben as their leader. In

1949, the Air Force became integrated and Ben attended the Air War College in Alabama. Ben was an excellent leader (as I had always said) and was made chief of the Air Defense Branch of Air Force Operations in 1950. In 1954 he followed in his father's footsteps and became the Air Forces first black general, just as his father had been in the army. His father is famous for the exact same thing in the army. His father also fought in the Spanish-American War as a lieutenant and in 1899 enlisted in the regular army as a private. He rose through years of service to become the first African-American general in the U.S. army in 1940. After the World War II he served as assistant inspector general. He retired in 1948. In 1959, Ben achieved a life long dream and became the first Black Major General. In 1965, he was made lieutenant general and Air Force Chief of staff in South Korea. Ben finally retired in 1970 (that's what you probably heard) and served currently assistant secretary of the Department of Transportation since 1971. That's what has happened so far. There may be more, if something happens I'll let you know soon.

From,
Uncle Jake

7/1/1971

Dear Uncle Jake,

Thank you for telling me so much about Ben. I won't let Fred bother me anymore. I wish I could say the same for my sister. I'll try to keep in touch with you between the family reunions.

From,
Will

7/21/1998

Dear William,

Hello. I know it has been a long time since I last wrote to you. Do you remember all those years ago when I told you I would tell you if there was more to Ben and his story? Well President Clinton just awarded the 86-year-old Ben Davis his fourth star at a ceremony at the White House. It was truly a proud day for us Blacks.

Yours Truly,
Uncle Jake

7/29/1998

Dear Uncle Jake,

You probably already know, but let me tell you for myself. I'm now in the Air Corps and am doing fine. I don't think I would have made it this far if it wasn't for you and Ben. Because of you I was able to learn about him and because of him I saw that Blacks could do great things.

From,
Will

P.S.: My sister still never did get less annoying.

Note: Benjamin Oliver Davis died on died July 4, 2002, Washington, D.C. He was 96 years old.

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