



# Smithsonian

*National Air and Space Museum*

## Helen G. James Collection

James, Helen G. Collection

Patricia Williams

2018

National Air and Space Museum Archives  
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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	National Air and Space Museum Archives
<b>Title:</b>	Helen G. James Collection
<b>Date:</b>	1952-1955, 2018 (bulk 1952-1955)
<b>Identifier:</b>	NASM.2018.0042
<b>Creator:</b>	James, Helen G.
<b>Extent:</b>	0.13 Cubic feet (1 box)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	This collection consists of one nine by six inch green photograph album containing 70 pages of back and white images, mostly snapshots, relating to Helen G. James' United States Air Force career, 1952-1955. The collection also contains James' military and discharge records as well as legal documents from her discharge lawsuit.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

Helen James, Gift, 2018, NASM.2018.0042

### Processing Information

Arranged and described by Patricia Williams, encoded by Jessamyn Lloyd, 2018.

### Preferred Citation

Helen G. James Collection, NASM.2018.0042, National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution.

### Restrictions

No restrictions on access

### Conditions Governing Use

Material is subject to Smithsonian Terms of Use. Should you wish to use NASM material in any medium, please submit an Application for Permission to Reproduce NASM Material, available at [Permissions Requests](#) .

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## Biographical / Historical

Helen G. James, born and raised in rural Pennsylvania, enlisted in the US Air Force in 1952. Receiving positive performance evaluations, she was promoted from radio operator to crew chief, achieving the rank of Airman Second Class. While stationed at Roslyn Air Force Base, James came under investigation by the Office of Special Investigations (OSI) as part of the "Lavender Scare," the campaign to remove all lesbian and gay people from government employment in the 1950s. She was arrested and discharged as "undesirable"

with no severance pay or other benefits. James then moved to California where she got an advanced degree in physical therapy from Stanford University. In 1972, she began teaching in the physical therapy program at California State University at Fresno and in 1989 she went into private practice. During the 1960s James successfully upgraded her status from "undesirable" to "General Discharge under Honorable conditions." As her less than honorable discharge status was always on her mind she successfully sued the US Air Force in January 2018 to have her discharge upgraded to honorable. James is now eligible for all Veterans benefits, including access to health care for the US Department of Veterans Affairs and burial in a national cemetery.

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## Scope and Contents

This collection consists of one nine by six inch green photograph album containing 70 pages of back and white images, mostly snapshots, relating to Helen G. James' United States Air Force career, 1952-1955. The collection also contains James' military and discharge records as well as legal documents from her discharge lawsuit, and two photographs of a bronze cast sculpture of James' hand, holding her dog tag.

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## Arrangement

Collection is in original order.

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Aeronautics, Military
- Lesbian and gay experience
- Women in aeronautics

## Container Listing

Box 1, Folder 1	<a href="#">[Photo Album], 1952-1955</a>
Box 1, Folder 2	<a href="#">[Military Records], 1953-1955</a>
Box 1, Folder 3	<a href="#">[Legal Documents - Discharge Lawsuit], 2018</a>
Box 1, Folder 4	<a href="#">[Sculpture Photographs], 2018</a>