

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Augustine Davis

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Davis, Augustine, 1917-2014
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Augustine Davis,
Dates:	July 9, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:31:15).
Abstract:	Pharmacist and sailor Augustine Davis (1917 - 2014) was a World War II Navy gunner and Pearl Harbor survivor. After the war, Davis attended Ohio State University and earned his B.S. degree in pre-medicine, then graduated from the Ohio State College of Pharmacy, one of the few blacks to have done so at the time. Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 9, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_100
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Augustine Davis, survivor of the attack on Pearl Harbor and pioneering black pharmacist, was born on November 19, 1917, in LaGrange, Texas. His early years were spent helping his family with farm work. Aware of the lack of medical attention available to his family, Davis desired to become a doctor. When he graduated in 1936 from Taylor High School in Taylor, Texas, Davis needed money to attend college, but he was unable to find a working scholarship available for any of the black colleges.

To finance his college education, Davis enlisted in the U.S. Army's segregated black 25th Infantry, which recruiters told him was the only armed black unit in the Army. After a three-year stint, he still needed tuition money, so he enlisted in the still-segregated U.S. Navy. The pay from the U.S. Navy was a little higher, though all black recruits were assigned special duty in the messman branch. However, Davis' naval duty, which superseded special duty, was that of a gunner.

At daybreak, on December 7, 1941, the Japanese military launched a surprise attack on the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Davis rushed to his gun as the enemy opened fire on the U.S.S. Breese. One plane flew so low that Davis could see the pilot's face. His loaders never reached him, but somehow Davis loaded his gun and fired back, only to see planes disappear into clouds of smoke. His gun was the only one on the Breese to get into action, but Davis received no citations for valor. He went on to see combat duty in other pivotal engagements, including the Battle of Midway. Davis was placed in charge of a battery aboard the U.S.S. Essex, which consisted of four anti-aircraft machine guns, all manned by black men.

After the war, Davis attended Ohio State University and earned his B.S. degree in pre-medicine, then graduated from the Ohio State College of Pharmacy – one of few blacks to have done so. Davis retired after a long professional career. He has two daughters, six grandchildren and two siblings. He lived with his wife, Gwendolyn,

in Montclair, New Jersey.

Davis passed away on July 5, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Augustine Davis was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 9, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Pharmacist and sailor Augustine Davis (1917 - 2014) was a World War II Navy gunner and Pearl Harbor survivor. After the war, Davis attended Ohio State University and earned his B.S. degree in pre-medicine, then graduated from the Ohio State College of Pharmacy, one of the few blacks to have done so at the time.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Davis, Augustine, 1917-2014

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Davis, Augustine, 1917-2014--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. Navy.

Occupations:

Pharmacist

Sailor

HistoryMakers® Category:

MedicalMakers|MilitaryMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Augustine Davis, July 9, 2002. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

- Video Oral History Interview with Augustine Davis, Section A2002_100_001_001, TRT: 0:29:29 ?
Soldier and pharmacist Augustine Davis describes his family background and shares memories of his childhood growing up in La Grange, Texas. Davis recalls some particularly vivid memories of racism, including witnessing a lynching and feeling the effects of Jim Crow. Davis also has happy memories, reckoning that he would rather have grown up then, despite the racial problems, than now.
- Video Oral History Interview with Augustine Davis, Section A2002_100_001_002, TRT: 0:30:15 ?
Soldier and pharmacist Augustine Davis shares vivid, detailed memories of his childhood and youth in rural Texas. Davis recalls balancing school work with harvesting cotton, and also tells of the day he left home after an altercation with his father. Davis shares a long story about the time he was falsely imprisoned for a month in Katy, Texas, and explains how he made his way back home. Davis then explains why he decided to join the military, starting in the Army and switching to the Navy due to the Navy's better pay.
- Video Oral History Interview with Augustine Davis, Section A2002_100_001_003, TRT: 0:29:45 ?
Soldier and pharmacist Augustine Davis tells of his experiences about the "day which shall live in infamy", the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. Davis explains how his destroyer, the U.S.S. Breese, came under fire and how he was the only member of the crew to return fire against the Japanese planes. Davis says that he would have received a medal for his actions had the Navy not been segregated. Davis details the effects of segregation in the Navy and explains how one of his admirals recognized the qualities of black troops and repealed the ship's segregation. Davis also addresses the common misperception that blacks were not allowed to fire guns in the Navy at the time.
- Video Oral History Interview with Augustine Davis, Section A2002_100_001_004, TRT: 0:31:26 ?
Soldier and pharmacist Augustine Davis continues to describe his role during the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. Davis recalls the scenes of death and destruction on other American ships, and explains how his ship managed to stay relatively undamaged. Davis then discusses the impact of the attack on U.S. naval strategy in the Pacific for the rest of World War II. Davis then reflects on his time in the military, lamenting how his and other African Americans' service during World War II has been largely unappreciated.
- Video Oral History Interview with Augustine Davis, Section A2002_100_001_005, TRT: 0:29:40 ?
Soldier and pharmacist Augustine Davis continues to describe his duties and experiences in the U.S. Navy during World War II. Davis details his involvement in the Battle of Midway, explaining the strategies and key events of the battle, including common misperceptions about the battle. Davis then shifts his focus to a discussion about how African American soldiers and sailors were not appreciated on the home front or onboard their own ships during the war, a fact he illustrates with numerous anecdotes about his encounters with racism.
- Video Oral History Interview with Augustine Davis, Section A2002_100_001_006, TRT: 0:29:45 ?
Soldier and pharmacist Augustine Davis recalls starting his life anew after returning from his service in World War II. Davis explains his experiences attending Bates College, which he left due to struggles with vertigo, Ohio State University, and Ohio State pharmacy school. Davis recounts the many instances of racism he encountered during his time in college, and explains how discrimination prevented him from pursuing a medical doctor degree. Davis then explains the racism he encountered in his new field of pharmacy, outlining discriminatory hiring practices and advancement practices, which kept him from working in the lucrative private pharmaceutical industry.

Video Oral History Interview with Augustine Davis, Section A2002_100_001_007, TRT: 0:30:55 ?

Soldier and pharmacist Augustine Davis discusses the prevalence of racism in the United States, using examples from his own life and events that made national news to illustrate his points. Davis talks about how young African Americans must be informed that racism still exists and that there are barriers for them to overcome. Davis then reflects on his life and career, sharing his final thoughts on his parents and explaining how he would like to be remembered.