

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Brooks, Leo A.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks,
Dates:	December 2, 2013 and July 22, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	11 uncompressed MOV digital video files (5:06:53).
Abstract:	Major general (retired) Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks (1932 -) served in the United States Army for over thirty years. His family was the first African American family with three members that have achieved the rank of General within two generations. Brooks was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 2, 2013 and July 22, 2013, in Fort Belvoir, Virginia and Ft. Belvoir, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_169
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Retired U.S. Army Brigadier General Leo Brooks was born on August 9, 1932 in Alexandria, Virginia. Brooks was raised in Alexandria where his family has a long military tradition, dating back to Brooks' great-grandfather. Brooks attended Virginia State University where he was also a member of the Reserve Officers Training Corps. Brooks graduated from Virginia State University in 1954 and was a distinguished military graduate from ROTC. General Brooks was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Quartermaster Corps.

During his first overseas assignment, he received a Regular Army commission and was detailed to the Infantry, where he served as a platoon leader with the 2nd Infantry Division in Alaska. Following his Infantry detail, he rejoined the Quartermaster Branch and commanded two companies. His initial Pentagon assignment was as a budget liaison to the U.S. Congress for the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, HQDA. He served two tours in Vietnam, first as an advisor to the Vietnamese Army and later as a Battalion Commander. Other key staff assignments included: Deputy Secretary of the General Staff for the Army Materiel Command and member of J4, Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Considered one of the Army's premier logisticians, his key senior-level assignments included four commands over a ten year period: Commander, Sacramento Army Depot; Commander, 13th Corps Support Command, Fort Hood, Texas; Commanding General, US Army Troop Support Agency, where he directed 178 commissary stores; and Commanding General of the Defense Personnel Support Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where he directed the procurement and management of all food, clothing, textile, and medical supplies and equipment for all the military services. He retired while serving as a Major General in 1984 to accept an appointment as the Managing Director of the City of Philadelphia. Since he retired before serving three full years in grade, he was retired as a Brigadier General. His awards include the Distinguished Service Medal, the Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Joint Service Commendation Medal, and Army Commendation Medal.

General Brooks holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Virginia State University, a Master of Science in Financial Management from George Washington University and the Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree from New England School of Law. He is also a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and the National War College in Washington, D.C. General Brooks' family is the only African American family in the history of the United States to have a father and two sons to attain the rank of general in the army-BG Leo A. Brooks, Jr. (USA-Ret.) and General Vincent K. Brooks, Commander, US Army Pacific. In retirement, he has served on many boards and councils. He currently is an elected member of the American Bar Association Council on Legal Education and Accreditation of law schools.

General Brooks lives in Naples, Florida. He is married to Debra Rub Brooks and has a daughter, attorney Marquita K. Brooks.

U.S. Army Brigadier General (Ret.) Leo A. Brooks was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 22, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 2, 2013 and July 22, 2013, in Fort Belvoir, Virginia and Ft. Belvoir, Virginia, and was recorded on 11 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Major general (retired) Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks (1932 -) served in the United States Army for over thirty years. His family was the first African American family with three members that have achieved the rank of General within two generations.

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:

Brooks, Leo A.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brooks, Leo A.--Interviews

United States--Armed Forces--African American Generals--Interviews.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Major General (Retired)

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks, December 2, 2013 and July 22, 2013. 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 Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks, Section A2013_169_001_001, TRT: 1:28:47 ?

Brig. Gen. Leo Brooks describes his family background. Brooks' mother, Evelyn Lemon Brooks, was born on June 14, 1908 in Warm Springs, Virginia. Her parents were Eckard and Martha Lemon. Her paternal great-great grandfather was an Irish doctor who married an African American and American Indian wife. Their daughter's name was Mariah and Mariah was the mother of her father. Brooks' mother was working for a family in Pennsylvania as a domestic; when one night she went to a dance and met Brooks' father, Houston George Brooks, Sr. Brooks' father was born December 24, 1904 in Alexandria, Virginia to Mamie and Henry Curtis Brooks. His great grandfather, Richard Henry Brooks, was born a slave, but fled the plantation and ended up working for a Union Army artillery officer in Maine. His wife was Mary Francis Smith-Brooks. Brooks' family lived in Virginia when he was a child. He describes the home and neighborhood he grew up in.

African American families.

African American mothers--Virginia.

African American grandparents.

African American fathers--Virginia.

Childhood--Virginia.

Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks, Section A2013_169_001_002, TRT: 2:28:54 ?

Brig. Gen. Leo Brooks talks about his siblings, Houston George Brooks, Jr.; Henry Curtis Brooks, Nellie Victoria Brooks Quander, and Francis Keith Brooks. He also discusses the role of education in his family's success. It went back to his great-grandfather, Richard Henry Brooks, and grandfather, Henry Curtis Brooks, who focused on education as a way out of segregation. Brooks talks about Parker-Gray High School, which he and his siblings attended and comments on integration in Alexandria, Virginia. He describes his earliest childhood memory as well as the sights, sounds and smells of growing up in Virginia.

African American families.

Education--Virginia.

African American grandfathers.

Education, Secondary--Virginia.

Childhood--Virginia.

Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks, Section A2013_169_001_003, TRT: 3:28:40 ?

Brig. Gen. Leo Brooks talks about playing the trombone and participating in the Boy Scouts as a youth. He remembers his childhood education, learning his multiplication tables and the stern lecture he got from his father about improving his grades. Brooks went to Parker-Gray Elementary/High School in Alexandria, Virginia. He talks about his extracurricular activities in high school and the teachers and mentors who influenced him. Brooks attended Virginia State University where he was president of Alpha Phi Alpha, student government and regimental adjutant of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). He describes campus life at Virginia State University and remembers the people there who were special to him.

Music--Instruction and study.

Boy Scouts of America.

Education--Virginia.

Virginia State University.

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity.

United States. Army. Reserve Officers' Training Corps.

Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks, Section A2013_169_001_004, TRT: 4:29:21 ?

Brig. Gen. Leo Brooks discusses Petersburg, Virginia's military history. Brooks also talks about his experience in Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and why he initially decided not to join the U.S. Army. Brooks' first assignment was as second lieutenant in the Quartermaster Corps at Fort Lee in Virginia. His first commission was with the Army at Fort Richardson in Alaska. Brooks talks about his wife and two sons, Vincent and Leo Brooks, Jr. who were born in Alaska. He recalls his first ROTC assignment to Central State College as well as his orders to go to Vietnam.

Military history--Virginia.

United States. Army. Reserve Officers' Training Corps.

Fort Lee (Va.)

Fort Richardson (Alaska)

African American families.

Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks, Section A2013_169_001_005, TRT: 5:28:58 ?

Brig. Gen. Leo Brooks discusses his role as an advisor in Vietnam during the war. Brooks was stationed at the 121st Vietnamese Depot in Qui Nhon, Vietnam. His role increased, because he learned to speak Vietnamese from the interpreter assigned to work with him. Brooks served two tours in Vietnam; first as an advisor and then later as a battalion commander. When he returned from his first tour of duty in Vietnam, he attended George Washington University where he earned a M.S. degree in financial management. Brooks describes his experiences as a battalion commander and the techniques he used with his unit. He also talks about race relations in the U.S. Army and the greater opportunities for advancement there.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

Qui Nhon (Vietnam)

George Washington University.

United States--Armed Forces--African Americans.

Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks, Section A2013_169_001_006, TRT: 6:29:04 ?

Brig. Gen. Leo Brooks graduated from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas and was sent to work at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. during the late 1960s. Brooks served as a budget liaison to the U.S. Congress for the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics,(Headquarters, Department of the Army). During this assignment he worked for U.S. Army General Henry Augustine Miley, Jr. and General Fred Kornett on Capitol Hill. Brooks discusses his second tour of duty in Vietnam and the problem of heroine among U.S. soldiers in the 1970s. Additionally, he discusses his military awards, which include a Legion of Merit and a Bronze Star Medal for service in Vietnam. Brooks recalls his attendance at the National War College in 1972 and becoming commander of the Sacramento Army Depot in 1974. He describes his sons' adjustment to high school in California and his son Vincent's college admissions experience.

Fort Leavenworth (Kan.)

Pentagon (Va.)

Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

Soldiers--Drug use--United States.

Sacramento Army Depot (Calif.)

Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks, Section A2013_169_002_007, TRT: 7:29:51 ?

Maj. Gen. Leo Brooks, Sr. served in the U.S. Army in the Vietnam War and returned from combat in 1971. At that time, he became the deputy secretary of the general staff of the U.S. Army Materiel Command in Washington, D.C. Brooks worked in that capacity for a year, and was then accepted to the National War College in Washington, D.C. While there, Brooks was selected for a promotion to colonel, and was later assigned to the office of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as the Cambodian desk officer. After thirteen months as the Cambodian desk officer, Brooks was promoted to colonel and sent to Sacramento Army Depot in Sacramento, California, where he served as commander. During his tenure in this position, he oversaw the management of general supplies and technology distribution for U.S. military outfits in the western United States. In 1973, after the Total Force policy ended the draft, Brooks was assigned to Fort Hood, Texas to lead the 13th Sustainment Command.

Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks, Section A2013_169_002_008, TRT: 8:28:15 ?

Maj. Gen. Leo Brooks, Sr. served as a colonel in the 13th Sustainment Command in Fort Hood, Texas, where he worked with female company commanders like Captain Donna Lightfoot. Brooks also worked toward rectifying issues of gender discrimination in his units and among his officers. In 1976, Brooks was assigned to inventory management, where he oversaw the inventory of supplies and maintenance for all transportation and service vehicles. He also assisted in the organization of the specialized battalions for service and maintenance, which helped reduce the demand for costly replacement engines. During this period, he worked alongside George S. Patton III and General Julius Becton, Jr. He was also mentored by Robert M. Shoemaker, commander of the 3rd Corps in Fort Hood, who taught him important lessons about leadership. In 1978, Brooks was appointed to brigadier general. In this section, he also describes the promotion process in the U.S.

military and how their processes developed over time.

Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks, Section A2013_169_002_009, TRT: 9:30:45 ?

Maj. Gen. Leo Brooks, Sr. was promoted to brigadier general, and sent to Fort Lee, Virginia, where he managed the commissaries, clothing and textile systems for over 180 U.S. Army posts around the world. In this position, Brooks traveled between different U.S. military posts to inspect and oversee commissary operations. After three years, he was sent to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he was responsible for the procurement of food, clothing, equipment and medical supplies for all of the U.S. Armed Forces and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Brooks also started the initiative to develop an automation system for the purchase and management of food items, textiles and supplies for military troops. While stationed in Philadelphia, Brooks became involved in the community. Shortly after the election of Philadelphia's first black mayor, The Honorable Reverend Dr. W. Wilson Goode, Sr., Brooks was offered the position of city manager, at which time he retired from the military as a major general.

Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks, Section A2013_169_002_010, TRT: 10:30:43 ?

Maj. Gen. Leo Brooks, Sr. served as city manager for the City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In this capacity, Brooks oversaw the operation of ten different service departments in the city, and worked directly with labor unions, management organizations and human service departments. He was also responsible for coordinating the activities of the fire, police and health departments. In May of 1985, the MOVE crisis in Philadelphia came to a head after the subsequent bombing and raid of the black liberation group's communal settlement in West Philadelphia. Shortly after the incident, Brooks resigned from his position citing familial obligations, and moved to Virginia to care for his ailing father, Houston Brooks, Sr. After his father passed away, Brooks worked briefly as an independent contractor. He then officially retired, and spent time with his wife traveling the United States. Brooks concludes this portion of the interview by talking about his family, and his post retirement activities.

Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Leo A. Brooks, Section A2013_169_002_011, TRT: 11:13:35 ?

Maj. Gen. Leo Brooks, Sr. reflects upon his life, marriage and professional legacy. Brooks' two sons, Brigadier General Leo Brooks, Jr. and General Vincent Brook, also developed distinguished careers in the military. He also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.