

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lt. Col. Harry B. Johnson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Johnson, Harry B., 1940-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Harry B. Johnson,
Dates:	September 17, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:10:35).
Abstract:	Lieutenant colonel Lt. Col. Harry B. Johnson (1940 -) is a retired Lieutenant Colonel who served as the Chief of Army Corrections. Johnson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 17, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_223
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Security executive and retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Harry B. Johnson was born in Tip Top, Virginia, on August 21, 1940. On his father's side, he is related to the first black U.S. Senator, Hiram R. Revels. Johnson was raised in humble circumstances by his aunt, Addie M. Hairston, in Bluefield, West Virginia. There, he attended Jones Street Elementary School and was a basketball star at Park Central High School. In 1958, Johnson earned an athletic scholarship to Morgan State College in Baltimore, Maryland, where he received a B.A. in history in 1962. That same year, he fulfilled his ROTC obligation by being inducted into the U.S. Army as a second lieutenant.

Johnson served two tours of duty in Vietnam, where he was a tank commander for Company A of the 504th Military Battalion. He volunteered for and successfully completed Ranger training and at one time reported directly to General William Westmoreland. Choosing the military as a career, Johnson was drawn to security-related assignments. He served as provost marshal of the North Baden Area, West Germany; provost marshal of Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; chief of the U.S. Army Corrections Program; and program manager of the Military Personnel Center.

Johnson went on to earn an M.P.A. from Central Michigan University and an M.A. from Wichita State University. In 1983, Johnson retired from the army and accepted a section chief position with the World Bank, eventually rising to senior manager and division chief. Today he is an executive consultant for Security, Education and Environmental Enterprises. His numerous military awards include the Legion of Merit, three Bronze Stars and the Morgan State University Military Hall of Fame.

Johnson lives in Washington, D.C., with his wife, Sandra, where he enjoys lecturing on African American history.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lt. Col. Harry B. Johnson was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 17, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Lieutenant colonel Lt. Col. Harry B. Johnson (1940 -) is a retired Lieutenant Colonel who served as the Chief of Army Corrections.

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:

Johnson, Harry B., 1940-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Johnson, Harry B., 1940---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. Army.

Occupations:

Lieutenant Colonel

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 Lt. Col. Harry B. Johnson, September 17, 2003. 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 Lt. Col. Harry B. Johnson, Section A2003_223_001_001, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Harry B. Johnson was born on August 21, 1940 in Tiptop, Virginia. His father, Joseph Johnson, was born in Jenkinjones, West Virginia in 1923. Joseph Johnson's mother was Mexican and he never knew his father. Joseph Johnson was a cook in the U.S. Navy during World War II and at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Johnson's mother, Eunice Revels, was born in 1924 in Tiptop, Virginia. Her father was descended from Cherokee Indians and she spent six years in a sanatorium for tuberculosis before she died when Johnson was eight years old. Johnson's father left town after he impregnated Johnson's

mother because he was afraid her brothers would attack him. Johnson did not know his father until he was sixteen years old. He lived with his maternal grandparents in rural Tiptop for the first five years of his life where he went hunting with his grandfather. He then lived with various relatives until his maternal aunt, Attie M. Hairston, adopted him when he was twelve years old. She had a positive impact on him.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Harry B. Johnson, Section A2003_223_001_002, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Harry B. Johnson enjoyed reading as a child and had trouble with authority figures, such as his uncles. He lived with various relatives and in a home for women, until his aunt adopted him after she ended an abusive relationship. Johnson was moved by her kindness towards him and her unconditional love. His aunt prevented doctors from amputating his right arm after he injured it playing football as a teenager. He describes how he regained use of his arm. Johnson attended Jones Street Elementary School and attended Park Central High School in Bluefield, West Virginia, where he was a great basketball player and earned good grades. His basketball team played in the West Virginia state championships. During high school, Johnson had a job at a local jewelry store and worked other odd jobs. Though some teachers were insensitive to the challenges of his non-traditional home life, teachers and coaches took a special interest in Johnson after his athletic talent was discovered.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Harry B. Johnson, Section A2003_223_001_003, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Harry B. Johnson attended Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland from 1958 to 1962 where he majored in history, was on the basketball team and in ROTC. Johnson remembers figures such as his ROTC instructor Colonel Fowler, classmate HistoryMaker Earl G. Graves, football players Leroy Kelly and Jim Brown, and the chair of the history department Benjamin Quarels. Johnson was involved in the Civil Rights Movement while in college, but did not have the temperament to participate in nonviolent protests. He talks about meeting Malcolm X, the history of Storer College in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, and the life lessons he learned in college. After graduating in 1962, Johnson was made Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army. He recalls the segregation on the bus he rode to Fort Knox, Kentucky where he was one of only two African Americans in his course. While in Kentucky, he was kicked out of a segregated drive-in movie and later, faced housing discrimination when he tried to rent a home in Augusta, Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Harry B. Johnson, Section A2003_223_001_004, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Harry B. Johnson became the platoon leader of the 4th Armored Division in the U.S. Army, following his graduation from Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland in 1962. Johnson lost the opportunity to play basketball professionally because he had to report to active duty in the U.S. Army during the Cuban Missile Crisis. During the Vietnam War, Johnson led an integrated company of six-hundred men and assisted in writing prisoner of war policies. In Vietnam, he felt the need to prove himself because of his race which he states often unfortunately altered decision making. Johnson always felt committed to the Vietnam War, but the lack of civilian support for the war eroded the soldiers' morale and contributed to the perception that the United States lost the war. Johnson talks about the racial discrimination and segregation within the Army, specifically regarding officer training in the 1960s as well as the few number of African Americans in special units today.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Harry B. Johnson, Section A2003_223_001_005, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Harry B. Johnson reflects on how his experiences fighting in the Vietnam War from 1966 to 1968 changed him. After his first tour of duty in Vietnam, he decided to stay in the U.S. Army and trained as an Army Ranger, then returned to Vietnam for a second tour of duty. He describes some of the challenging decisions he made while fighting in Vietnam and his family's position on the war and how it differed from the general public's opposition to the war after 1968. Once the war ended, he attended the United States Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Johnson heard a recording of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s damaging conversation while serving as deputy chief of police in Fort Gordon, Georgia. He believes it was the same recording J. Edgar Hoover played for King when they met. Johnson also had a negative encounter with Ralph Abernathy in 1969. Johnson's career in the U.S. Army culminated in a position as a Special Assignment Officer in the White House until 1983.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Harry B. Johnson, Section A2003_223_001_006, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Harry B. Johnson began his career at the World Bank as a section chief of security operations. He eventually rose to be senior manager and division chief of security operations at the Bank. Johnson describes the history and function of the World Bank, in Washington, D.C. He believes that Bank could benefit from employing more people of color. Johnson hikes in his free time and lectures on African American history. His family is very proud of his success. Johnson considers what he would do differently in his life as well as his legacy, and describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Harry B. Johnson, Section A2003_223_001_007, TRT: 0:09:30 ?

Harry B. Johnson narrates his photographs.