Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Joseph Benjamin Anderson

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616
info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Joseph Benjamin Anderson

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Benjamin Anderson,

Dates: April 6, 2005, June 11, 2010

Bulk Dates: 2005, 2010

Physical Description: 6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:49:49).

Abstract: Corporate executive and military officer Joseph Benjamin Anderson (1943 - ) is a decorated Vietnam veteran, who served as the general director of the Pontiac Motors Division of General Motors and is the current chairman and chief executive officer of TAG Holdings. He sits on the board of several publicly-traded companies. Anderson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 6, 2005 in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and on June 11, 2010 in Troy, Michigan. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2005_099

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Corporate executive and military officer Joseph Benjamin Anderson was born on February 12, 1943, in Topeka, Kansas, to Pearl Gatewood and Joseph B. Anderson, Sr. His father was a widower with one son while his mother had two daughters from a previous marriage. An Eagle Scout and athlete, Anderson attended Washington Elementary School and East Topeka Junior High School before graduating with honors from Topeka High School in 1961. He entered the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, New York. While a cadet, Anderson spent two months in Uganda in 1964 with Operation Crossroads Africa. One of only four African Americans to graduate from West Point in 1965, he earned his B.S. degree in math and engineering and his commission as a second lieutenant. In 1972 and 1973, Anderson received master's degrees in political science and in African area studies from the University of California, Los Angeles and attended the U.S. Army’s Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1977. He graduated from the Advanced Management Program at Harvard University Business School in 1984.

An officer in the 82nd Airborne Division, Anderson served two tours of duty with the 1st Cavalry Division in Vietnam earning two Silver Stars, five Bronze Stars, three Army Commendation Medals and eleven Air Medals. As an infantry platoon leader, he was featured in Pierre Schoendoerffer’s 1966 Oscar winning documentary, "The Anderson Platoon." He served as aide-de-camp to two generals and taught as an assistant social sciences professor at West Point. He reached the rank of major before resigning his commission in 1978.

Selected as a White House Fellow in 1977, Anderson served as a special assistant to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Juanita Kreps. In 1979, he joined the Pontiac Motors Division of General Motors Corporation and, in
1990, he served as the general director of the company’s body hardware business unit. From 1992 to 1993, Anderson was the president and chief executive officer of auto parts manufacturer, Composite Energy Management Systems. He later served as the chairman and chief executive officer of Chivas Industries until 2002. He then joined TAG Holdings as chairman and chief executive officer. A board member of Quaker Chemical Corporation and ArvinMeritor, Anderson is also chairman of the Original Equipment Suppliers Association and director of the Society of Automobile Engineers Foundation. He also sits on the board of many non-profit organizations, including the Beaumont Foundation, Kettering University, Horizons-Upward Bound, Focus: Hope and the National Recreation Foundation.

Joseph Anderson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 6, 2005 and on June 11, 2010.

**Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Joseph Benjamin Anderson was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 6, 2005 in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and on June 11, 2010 in Troy, Michigan, and was recorded on 6 Betacam SP videocassettes. Corporate executive and military officer Joseph Benjamin Anderson (1943 - ) is a decorated Vietnam veteran, who served as the general director of the Pontiac Motors Division of General Motors and is the current chairman and chief executive officer of TAG Holdings. He sits on the board of several publicly-traded companies.

**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:**

Anderson, Joseph Benjamin

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)
Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.
Anderson, Joseph Benjamin--Interviews.

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

African American chief executive officers--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

General Motors Corporation

United States. Army. Airborne Division, 82nd

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/8/2011 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, April 6, 2005, June 11, 2010

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Benjamin Anderson, Section A2005_099_001_001, TRT: 0:30:20 2005/04/06

Joseph Anderson shares memories of his parents and his childhood in Topeka, Kansas. His father, Joseph Anderson, Sr., was a widower with one son while his mother, Pearl Anderson, had two daughters from a previous marriage. Anderson was primarily raised as an only child since his siblings were much older. While Anderson was growing up, his brother served in the Korean War and his sisters soon married and left home. His family lived in a racially segregated area on the east side of Topeka. The neighborhood was called Mudtown because the streets were unpaved. He was not allowed to attend the whites-only school across the street but instead had to walk several blocks to the all-black school. Despite this discrimination, he recalls a rich upbringing in the African American community. He was an excellent student and actively involved in sports, choir and church.

African American families--Kansas--Topeka.
African American parents--Kansas--Topeka.
Segregation in education--Kansas--Topeka.
Stepfamilies--Kansas--Topeka.
African Americans--Social life and customs--Kansas--Topeka.

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Benjamin Anderson, Section A2005_099_001_002, TRT: 0:28:00 2005/04/06

Joseph Anderson briefly describes the differences between Topeka, Kansas and conservative Orange County, California, where his father's family moved in the 1940s. He then talks about his high school years in Topeka, where he was active in sports, choir and the youth chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He also participated in the American Legion's Boys State, an experience that facilitated his entry into the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1961. Anderson discusses his time at West Point. Although he did not experience the overt racism of the past, he noted institutional racism. Of the 900 students, only five or six were African American. Active in student life, Anderson participated in the glee club, cadet chapel choir and football. In 1965, Anderson was one of four African American graduates in a class of six hundred cadets.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Kansas--Topeka.
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.
African American military cadets--New York (State)--West Point.
United States Military Academy.
Boys--Societies and clubs--Kansas--Topeka.
Joseph Anderson discusses volunteering in Uganda through Operation Crossroads Africa while at the United States Military Academy at West Point. After graduating as a 2nd lieutenant in 1965, Anderson served as a platoon leader in Vietnam for two tours of duty. During his first tour, he was the subject of the documentary, "The Anderson Platoon," which won an Academy Award and an Emmy Award. He speaks at length about the differences between the two tours, including the transition from a volunteer army to one of draftees. Anderson describes his experiences outside of the military. In 1972 and 1973, he earned M.A. degrees in Africa area studies and political science, respectively, from the University of California, Los Angeles. He was a professor at West Point before attending the Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. In 1977, he became a White House fellow in the Carter Administration.

United States Military Academy.

Armed Forces--African American officers.
United States. Army. 82nd Airborne Division.
United States--Armed Forces--Recruiting, enlistment, etc.
African Americans--Study and teaching (Higher).
President’s Commission on White House Fellows (U.S.).
Civil Service--Study and teaching (Internship)--United States.

Joseph Anderson discusses the social and racial climate after he returned from Vietnam in 1971. He studied at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where he earned two master's degrees in African area studies and in political science. He then returned to the United States Military Academy at West Point for a three-year teaching assignment. In 1976, he was assigned to the Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, for his next level of training. Anderson then talks about his selection as a White House Fellow in 1977. He worked in the Department of Commerce under Secretary of Commerce Juanita Kreps, an experience that was a personal and professional highlight. After two years, Anderson decided to resign from the Army so that he could enter private industry. In 1979, he accepted a position at General Motors as the director of quality of control.

Armed Forces--African American officers.
African Americans--Study and teaching (Higher).
President’s Commission on White House Fellows (U.S.).
Civil Service--Study and teaching (Internship)--United States.

Joseph Anderson talks about his career at General Motors and his new leadership responsibilities in the automotive industry. When he arrived at General Motors, he was promoted to plant manager in half of the usual time and continued to rise through the ranks. In 1990 he was appointed as the general director of the company’s body hardware business unit, where he managed 7,000 employees and revenues of $1 billion. He discusses the changes
within the American automotive industry during his career and his mentors at General Motors, who included Jim Fitzpatrick and Robert Stempel, the company's future chief executive officer. In 1992, as General Motors was restructuring, Anderson left to become president of Composite Energy Management in 1992 and then started his own company, Chivas Products, a manufacturer of interior automotive components in 1994. In 2002, he sold the company and founded TAG Holdings.

Automobile industry and trade.
African American chief executive officers.
General Motors Corporation.
African American business enterprises.

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Benjamin Anderson, Section A2005_099_002_006, TRT: 0:18:11 2010/06/11

Joseph Anderson talks about his business, TAG Holdings, which produces approximately $700 million in annual revenue assembling automotive components for Honda Motor Corporation and other companies. Anderson has served as president the Black National Association of Automobile Suppliers and the Original Equipment Suppliers Association. In the future, Anderson hopes to diversify his businesses into the defense, aerospace and health care industries. As his legacy, he wants to leave behind a minority-controlled business that can meet and exceed customer expectations. He would like to be remembered as someone who broke new ground and facilitated opportunities for others. Outside of his career, he has focused on improving conditions for youth through organizations such as Horizons-Upward Bound and the National Recreation Foundation.

African American chief executive officers.
African American business enterprises.
Automobile industry and trade.
Automobile supplies industry.
Nonprofit organizations--Management.