

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lt. Gen. Joe N. Ballard

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Ballard, Joe N., 1942-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Joe N. Ballard,
Dates:	February 22, 2023 and June 30, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005 and 2023
Physical Description:	13 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (6:05:42).
Abstract:	Military officer Lt. Col. Joe N. Ballard (1942 -) was the first African American to be appointed as the Chief of Engineers and Commander for the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Ballard was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 22, 2023 and June 30, 2005, in Davidsonville, Maryland and Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_157
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Retired Commanding General of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and entrepreneur Lieutenant General Joe Nathan Ballard was born on March 27, 1942 in Meeker, Louisiana. The son of sharecropper parents, Ballard grew up in Oakdale, Louisiana where he attended Allen Parish School for Colored Youth. As a child when his mother told him that his father was not able to read, it became Ballard's mission to teach his father to read. He read his father the Bible until 1960 when he went away to college. Ballard attended Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, majoring in electrical engineering. He graduated in 1965 and joined the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Ballard went on to earn an M.S. degree in engineering management from Missouri University of Science and Technology in 1972. He also graduated from the Engineer Officer Basic and Advanced Courses, the Army Command and General Staff College and the Army War College.

Ballard started his career in the U.S. Army while still in college, working with the advanced ROTC program at Southern University. When Ballard graduated in January of 1965, he immediately joined the U.S. Army as a second lieutenant and was assigned to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He was one of very few African Americans assigned to that unit. While in the U.S. Army, he served two tours in the Vietnam War, first, as platoon leader of the 84th Engineer Battalion. He, then attended the Engineer Officer Advanced Course and served as commander of Company C, 864th Engineer Battalion, and then chief of Lines of Communications Section Operations of the 18th Engineer Brigade. Between 1993 and 1995, Ballard served as Commander of the U.S. Army Engineer Center at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. He, then, served as Chief of Staff for the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. Subsequently, in 1996, Ballard made history by becoming the 49th Chief of Engineers for the U.S. Army, being the first African American to hold this position.

In 2000, Ballard retired from the U.S. Army. That same year, he became president and CEO of a business development company called the Ravens Group, LLC. In 2002, he founded TRG Construction, Inc., a general contracting firm, where he also serves as president and CEO.

Ballard has received several honors during his career. From the military, he received two Distinguished Service Medals, three Legion of Merit awards, two Bronze Stars, and few other honors. He has also received several honorary degrees, including an honorary doctorate of law from Lincoln University.

Ballard is now retired from the military and resides in Davidsonville, Maryland.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lt. Gen. Joe N. Ballard was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 22, 2023 and June 30, 2005, in Davidsonville, Maryland and Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 13 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Military officer Lt. Col. Joe N. Ballard (1942 -) was the first African American to be appointed as the Chief of Engineers and Commander for the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

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:

Ballard, Joe N., 1942-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Ballard, Joe N., 1942---Interviews

African American engineers--Interviews

African American generals--Interviews

United States. Army--Officers--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. Army. Corps of Engineers.

Occupations:

Military Officer

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. Gen. Joe N. Ballard, February 22, 2023 and June 30, 2005. 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. Gen. Joe N. Ballard, Section A2005_157_001_001, TRT: 0:30:12 ?

Joe Ballard was born in 1942 in Meeker, Louisiana. His mother, Bernice Clark, was born in Lecompte, Louisiana in 1922. Ballard's father, Joe Ballard, Sr., was born in 1921 in Lecompte, Louisiana. Ballard is the oldest of six children, and was raised on a farm in Meeker, Louisiana. Ballard says that he inherited his father's gentleness, and his mother's spirit. Ballard remembers spending Sunday afternoons reading the comics to his father. When he realized that his father could not read, Ballard began teaching his father to read and write. What began as instruction became a treasured time between father and son, and continued until Ballard left for college. Ballard also has memories of spending time fishing with his father on weekends.

African American engineers--Interviews.

African American generals--Interviews.

United States. Army--Officers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Joe N. Ballard, Section A2005_157_001_002, TRT: 0:29:26 ?

Joe Ballard talks about his upbringing in Louisiana. Ballard spent the first years of his life living on a farm in Meeker, Louisiana. He remembers the hard work associated with life on the farm and the lessons he learned there. When Ballard was seven years old, his parents, and several other members of his extended family, moved to Oakdale, Louisiana to find work. Ballard attended school in Oakdale, Louisiana, where his favorite teacher was Mrs. Glenn. Ballard then attended high school at the Allen Parish School for Colored Youth. His favorite high school teacher was Mrs. Washington, who took a special interest in him and exposed him to classical literature. Ballard was also influenced by his Boy Scout leader, Jessie Lee Anderson. The advent of television, and his resulting exposure to the world, enabled Ballard to dream about life beyond Louisiana.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Joe N. Ballard, Section A2005_157_001_003, TRT: 0:29:46 ?

Joe Ballard talks about his interest in electronics and his decision to attend Southern University. Ballard's interest in electronics stems from his work in the repair shop of his mentor and Boy Scout leader, Jesse Lee Anderson. After graduating from the Allen Parish School for Colored Youth, Ballard enrolled in Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana to study electrical engineering. While at Southern University, Ballard met Robert Love, who later played for the Chicago Bulls, and H. Rap Brown, who was involved with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Also during his time at Southern University, Ballard was influenced by several of his professors, including Dr. Payne Thurman, Dr. Sawshay, and Dr. Green. As a student, Ballard was also active with Reserve Officers Training Corp.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Joe N. Ballard, Section A2005_157_001_004, TRT: 0:29:21 ?

Joe Ballard talks about his military service and his activism at Southern University. Ballard's years at Southern University were years of great social change. African Americans throughout the country were protesting, marching, and speaking out for equality. As a student, Ballard joined other African Americans at Southern University in demonstrating for civil rights. Ballard also participated in advanced Reserve Officers Training Corp (ROTC), where he learned the invaluable skill of strategic thinking. In 1965, Ballard graduated from Southern University with his B.S. degree in electrical engineering. He then enlisted in the U.S. Army as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Corp of Engineers, one of the most segregated branches of the military. In 1966, Ballard served in Quinhon, Vietnam. As a platoon leader, Ballard coordinated the building of roads, bridges, and other facilities. Ballard returned to the U.S. in 1967, but returned to Vietnam for a second tour in 1968.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Joe N. Ballard, Section A2005_157_001_005, TRT: 0:28:55 ?

Joe Ballard talks about his military service. He faced unique challenges as an African American soldier, especially in the aftermath of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. After facing discrimination, and wrestling with questions about the war in Vietnam, Ballard left the military in 1969. That same year, he relocated to the Chicago-area to work as a division leader for Illinois Bell. His was the first African American family to live in suburban Des Plaines, Illinois. While he was at Illinois Bell, the U.S. Army contacted Ballard, offering him the chance to return to active duty and attend graduate school. Ballard accepted the offer and enrolled in the University of Missouri to study engineering management.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Joe N. Ballard, Section A2005_157_001_006, TRT: 0:27:47 ?

Joe Ballard talks about his military career. After a brief period of employment at Illinois Bell, Joe Ballard returned to the military. He was stationed in Detroit where he oversaw recruitment efforts. Under Ballard's direction, the U.S. Army met their recruiting objectives in Detroit. Ballard was then sent to Germany as a Battalion Commander. He later became a Community Commander in Caltrel, Germany. While in Germany, Ballard was selected to enroll in the prestigious Army War College in Carlisle. During this time, Ballard advanced. Ballard was mentored by Shalick Kosrilly and Johnny Wilson, and was able to establish a relationship with General Colin Powell.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Joe N. Ballard, Section A2005_157_002_007, TRT: 7:33:47 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Joe N. Ballard, Section A2005_157_002_008, TRT: 8:34:30 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Joe N. Ballard, Section A2005_157_002_009, TRT: 9:28:17 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Joe N. Ballard, Section A2005_157_002_010, TRT: 10:29:58 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Joe N. Ballard, Section A2005_157_002_011, TRT: 11:29:31 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Joe N. Ballard, Section A2005_157_002_012, TRT: 12:25:45 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Joe N. Ballard, Section A2005_157_002_013, TRT:
13:08:27 ?