

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks

---

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Brooks, Elmer T., 1932-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 10, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:38:00).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Brigadier general Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks (1932 - ) held positions in the U.S. Military as strategic Missile Wing Commander, Military Assistant to two Secretaries of Defense, and head of International Negotiations in Arms Control for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He also served in NASA Headquarters as Deputy Associate Administrator for Management and Facilities. Brooks was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 10, 2006, in Rockville, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_139
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Brigadier General Elmer T. Brooks completed thirty years of service in the United States Air Force in 1985, having held a variety of positions including: Executive to the Director, National Reconnaissance Office, Office of the Secretary of the Air Force (1973-1975); a principal aide to three successive Secretaries of Defense (1975-1978); Commander of a (Titan II) Strategic Missile Wing (1979-1981); head of International Negotiations (arms control), Organization of the Joint Chiefs

of Staff (1981-1983); and Assistant Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Research & Engineering (1983-1985). He had a second career as a government senior executive, serving in NASA Headquarters as Deputy Associate Administrator, Management & Facilities and Space Communications, (1988-1995).

Brooks was born in Washington, D.C. in 1932, where he attended its public schools, graduating from Dunbar High School in 1949. He received his B.A. degree in zoology from Miami University (Ohio) in 1954, and was commissioned through the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps program. In 1973, Brooks received his M.S. degree in administration from The George Washington University, Washington, D.C., and graduated from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. He completed The Executive Program of the Colgate Darden Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Virginia, under the Air Force's Advanced Management Program in 1978.

Brooks entered the Air Force in 1955, and was assigned to an Air Reserve Flying Center in Pittsburgh as Unit Administrative Officer and then as Base Director of Personnel. He then went to the Philippines as a radar station Commander and later served as a personnel division chief, Headquarters 13th Air Force, Clark Air Base. During the period of the Cuban Missile Crisis, he was a Missile Combat Crew Commander and Instructor Crew Commander with the Atlas F strategic missile system, Lincoln, Nebraska. From November 1965- May 1968, the General served in Houston as a Flight Control Technologist for the Gemini and Apollo space missions at NASA's Manned Spacecraft Center. His proudest achievement in his military career was his participation in the development of U.S. arms control policy as the representative of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He played a direct role in formulating the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties.

Brooks' awards and decorations include: the Defense Distinguished Service Medal; the Defense Superior Service Medal, with two Oak Leaf Clusters; the Legion of Merit; the Blanchard Trophy, as Commander of the unit which won the best missile wing competition; the NAACP Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Meritorious Award; the NASA Medal for Outstanding Leadership; and The George Washington University Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award.

Brooks was the seventh child of Warren R. Brooks (b. 1874) a mail carrier and government clerk, and Lelia (Williams) Brooks (b. 1888), a school teacher. He can trace his paternal ancestry back to slavery days. His paternal great-grandfather Albert Royal Brooks, was born a slave in 1818 on a James River (VA) plantation. Albert was first a field hand and later was hired out to work in a Richmond tobacco factory. He also became a successful businessman while yet a slave.

Eventually he was able to purchase his freedom and that of his wife Lucy Brooks (the general's great-grandmother) and three of their children. As a free man, Albert also became a politician and a civil rights activist.

Brooks is married to the former Kathryn Casselberry of Dayton, Ohio. They are the parents of a daughter and three sons. General and Mrs. Brooks reside in Rockville, Maryland.

Brooks was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 10, 2006.

---

## **Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks was conducted by Robert Hayden on November 10, 2006, in Rockville, Maryland, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Brigadier general Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks (1932 - ) held positions in the U.S. Military as strategic Missile Wing Commander, Military Assistant to two Secretaries of Defense, and head of International Negotiations in Arms Control for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He also served in NASA Headquarters as Deputy Associate Administrator for Management and Facilities.

---

## **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, Elmer T., 1932-

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Brown, Randall (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Brooks, Elmer T., 1932---Interviews

---

## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

United States. Air Force.

---

## **Occupations:**

Brigadier General

---

## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

## **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. Elmer T. Brooks, November 10, 2006. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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. Elmer T. Brooks, Section A2006\_139\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:17 2006/11/10

Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks was born on December 30, 1932 in Washington, D.C. to Lelia Williams Brooks and Warren Brooks, Sr. His paternal great-grandfather, Albert Royal Brooks, was enslaved in Chesterfield County, Virginia. In Richmond, Virginia, he met his wife, Lucy Goode Brooks, who taught him to read and write. After he bought his and his wife's freedom, he became deacon of Richmond's First African Baptist Church, while she cofounded the Friends' Asylum for Colored Orphans. Brooks' grandfather, Walter Henderson Brooks, was enslaved until the Civil War ended. He received a bachelor's degree in theology from Pennsylvania's Ashmun Institute. Brooks' mother was born in 1888 in Augusta, Georgia. Later, in Opequon, Virginia, she met Brooks' father, who moved there to recover from tuberculosis. A Howard University graduate, Brooks' father worked for the YMCA, the postal service and the WPA, and his mother taught. In Washington, D.C., Brooks and his siblings attended the Thomas P. Morgan Demonstration School.

Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks, Section A2006\_139\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:30 2006/11/10

Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks grew up in Washington, D.C. on T Street, in a working class professional neighborhood. With his family, he attended the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church, where his paternal grandfather, Walter Henderson Brooks, served as pastor from 1882 to 1945. Brooks' father, a Howard University graduate, worked for the WPA in the 1930s. Brooks attended the Thomas P. Morgan Demonstration School in Washington, D.C., where he skipped the second grade. After briefly attending Francis Junior High School, he transferred to Benjamin Banneker Junior High School. During this time, Brooks began playing basketball, and studied under artist Lois Mailou Jones. Brooks then attended Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, the first college preparatory high school for African Americans in the United States. There, Brooks' teacher, Alfred F. Nixon, inspired his interest in biology. He also recalls the school's guest speakers, like historian Carter G. Woodson and Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., the first black general.

Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks, Section A2006\_139\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:11 2006/11/10

Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks' aunt, Julia Brooks, was an assistant principal for twenty-six years at Washington, D.C.'s Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, where Brooks was a student. When his parents and aunt passed away, Brooks lived with his brother and sister. He also worked as a street shower operator, a playground assistant director and an airplane cleaner. In 1949, he matriculated at Howard University, where he played basketball, and pledged Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity. He transferred to Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, where he earned a bachelor's degree in zoology, and joined the U.S. Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps. He also married Kathryn Casselberry Brooks, with whom he had four children. After working briefly for the post office, Brooks embarked on his first Air Force assignment in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and then served as a detachment commander at Clark Air Base in the Philippines. He completed his Atlas intercontinental missile training at the Lincoln Air Force Base in Nebraska.

Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks, Section A2006\_139\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:59 2006/11/10

Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks served as an SM-65F Atlas missile commander at Lincoln Air Force Base in Nebraska for five years. He then moved to Houston, Texas to work for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) as a flight control technologist at the Manned Spacecraft Center. He served as an officer at Texas' Randolph Air Force Base, then earned his master's degree at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces in Washington, D.C. There, Brooks joined the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a military assistant to Thomas K. Latimer, and then to Secretaries of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Harold Brown. He returned to the U.S. Air Force as vice commander of the 381st Strategic Missile Wing at Kansas' McConnell Air Force Base, and was promoted to brigadier general. He was also a deputy of the US-USSR Standing Consultative Commission, and helped negotiate Cold War disarmament. Upon retiring from the Air Force, he worked in investment banking in London, England, then at NASA

Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks, Section A2006\_139\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:59 2006/11/10

Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks was received with hostility when he became vice commander of the 381st Strategic Missile Wing at the McConnell Air Force Base in Kansas. Due to his previous employment with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he was appointed instead of the base's incumbent officers. He also faced discrimination from Wichita's majority-white residents. After his retirement from the U.S. Air Force, Brooks served as a deputy associate administrator in space communications at NASA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Brooks also describes his family's legacy in the schools of Washington, D.C. Many of his relatives attended or taught at institutions such as Paul Laurence Dunbar High School and Howard University. Brooks reflects upon his life and career; his values; and how he would like to be remembered. He also describes his hopes for the African American community of Washington, D.C., and his advice for young people. Brooks concludes this part of the interview by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks, Section A2006\_139\_001\_006, TRT: 0:10:04 2006/11/10

Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks narrates his photographs.