Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory

Overview of the Collection

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

Creator: Col. Frederick Drew Gregory

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory,

Dates: July 27, 2007

Bulk Dates: 2007

Physical Description: 6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:49:08).

Abstract: Federal government administrator and aircraft commander Col. Frederick Drew Gregory (1941 - ) was an astronaut, the first African American space commander and the first African American Deputy Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Gregory was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 27, 2007, in Annapolis, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2007_215

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Federal government administrator and aircraft commander Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Sr. was born on January 7, 1941 in Washington, D.C. to Francis and Nora Gregory. The nephew of medical pioneer Dr. Charles Drew, Gregory grew up in a tight-knit family in Washington, D.C. He developed an interest in flying as a teenager and frequently attended air shows. After graduating from Anacostia High School in 1958, Gregory briefly attended Amherst College and American University before enrolling in the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He received his B.S. degree in 1964 and later obtained his M.S. degree in information systems from George Washington University in 1977.

Upon graduating from the U.S. Air Force Academy, Gregory underwent pilot training for a year before serving in Vietnam as a rescue pilot. He earned numerous military decorations, including the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1967. Gregory returned to the United States, where he was assigned as a missile support helicopter pilot flying the UH-1F at Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri. In 1970, Gregory was selected for test pilot school before being loaned to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) as an engineering test pilot in 1972. At the suggestion of General Benjamin Davis, the first African American general in the Air Force and a former Tuskegee Airman, Gregory applied to the astronaut training program in 1976 and was selected as one of thirty-five astronauts by NASA in 1978.

In April 1985, Gregory's first mission to space on the space shuttle Challenger launched from Kennedy Space Center. He served as the lead capsule communicator during the 1986 Challenger accident in which all seven astronauts onboard were killed. In 1989, Gregory became the first African American space commander when he commanded the mission STS-33 onboard the space shuttle Discovery. With the completion of his third space
mission on the space shuttle Atlantis in 1991, Gregory was appointed as Associate Administrator, Office of Safety and Mission Quality at the NASA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. In 1993, Gregory retired as a colonel from the Air Force after logging more than 6,976 hours of flying time in over fifty types of aircraft and 550 combat missions in Vietnam. Gregory continued to work with NASA and in 2001 was promoted to NASA Deputy Administrator. After head Administrator Sean O’Keefe left NASA, Gregory served as Acting Administrator of NASA, the first African American to hold this position.

Gregory and his wife Barbara Archer have two adult children, Frederick and Heather.

Col. Frederick Gregory was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on July 27, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory was conducted by Cheryl Butler on July 27, 2007, in Annapolis, Maryland, and was recorded on 6 Betacam SP videocassettes. Federal government administrator and aircraft commander Col. Frederick Drew Gregory (1941 - ) was an astronaut, the first African American space commander and the first African American Deputy Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

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:

Gregory, Frederick

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)
Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.
Gregory, Frederick--Interviews.

African American astronauts--Interviews.

African American pilots--Interviews.

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

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

United States. Air Force.

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 8/18/2011 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, July 27, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007_215_001_001, TRT: 0:28:32 2007/07/27

Col. Frederick Gregory slates the interview and discusses his family background, including his maternal uncle, the physician Dr. Charles Drew. At the time of his uncle's death in 1950, Gregory did not realize how important he was, knowing him only as Uncle Charlie. Gregory's mother, Nora Drew Gregory, was born in 1913 in Washington D.C. Gregory believes that his maternal family descended from free people of color. Gregory's father, Francis Anderson Gregory, was born in 1907 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to a family of educators and was a teacher before becoming an assistant superintendent of Washington, D.C. schools. Gregory was born and raised in Washington, D.C. He grew up in a tight-knit family and attended the city's segregated public schools. He had a rich education, where teachers took students on field trips to the symphony and other cultural events.

African American families--Washington (D.C.).
African American teachers.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007_215_001_002, TRT: 0:29:12 2007/07/27

Col. Frederick Gregory discusses his childhood and describes his southeast Washington, D.C. neighborhood, where there were few black families. He and the white children played together despite some white parents' misgivings. Gregory was conscious of race but his parents formed a protective barrier against racism. Gregory attended the segregated schools, Mott Elementary School and Banneker Junior High School until the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruling, when he was transferred to the predominantly white Sousa Junior High School and Anacostia High School. He discusses how he chose piloting as a career. At the age of five, one of his father's friends took him around a runway in a plane. Several Tuskegee Airmen were also regular visitors to his home. As a teenager at an air show, a pilot recommended that he attend the newly founded United States Air Force Academy in Colorado, and he entered the Air Force Academy in the class of 1964.

School integration--Washington (D.C.).
African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Washington (D.C.).
United States. Army Air Forces. Fighter Group, 332nd.
African American pilots.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007_215_001_003, TRT: 0:28:20 2007/07/27

Col. Frederick Gregory discusses his marriage to Barbara Archer in 1964. He experienced discrimination for the first time during his honeymoon while trying to check into a hotel in Tennessee. Gregory shares stories about his experiences in the Air Force Academy, which was a very tight-knit community. A member of the sixth class to graduate, Gregory recalls that it was difficult but he was determined to succeed. He only recalls one racial incident, after which the officer apologized profusely to him. After graduating in 1964, Gregory underwent pilot training at the Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas and in Reno, Nevada. He completed pilot training in 1965 and then spent a year in Da Nang, Vietnam as a rescue pilot. In 1969, he transitioned into flying fighter jets, such as the F4, in 1969. During this time, he became more aware of the Civil Rights Movement.

African Americans--Marriage.
Hotels--Southern states.
Segregation--Southern states.
African American pilots.
United States. Air Force Academy
United States--Armed Forces--African American officers.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007_215_001_004, TRT: 0:29:32 2007/07/27

Col. Frederick Gregory talks about his experiences serving as an Air Force rescue helicopter pilot from 1966 to 1967 in Da Nang, Vietnam. Although he was aware of the Vietnam War protests, he did not see any and believed that he was protecting Southeast Asia from Communism. Gregory describes meeting his infant daughter Heather for the first time while on leave. In 1970, Gregory was selected for test pilot school and, two years later, was loaned to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration as an engineering test pilot.

Four years later, General Benjamin Davis, the first African American general in the Air Force and a former Tuskegee Airman, called him and encouraged him to apply for the astronaut program. On January 16, 1978, Gregory was selected as an astronaut. He was not the only man of color as Ron McNair, Guion Bluford, and Charlie Bolden joined the program later.

African American pilots.
United States--Armed Forces--African American officers.
African American test pilots.
African American astronauts.
Davis, Benjamin O. (Benjamin Oliver), 1912-2002.
Bluford, Guion Stewart, 1942-.
Bolden, Charles, 1946-.
United States. National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007_215_001_005,
TRT: 0:31:06 2007/07/27

Col. Frederick Gregory reflects on his career path to becoming an astronaut, a challenge he has enjoyed but did not expect. He recalls being fascinated when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon in 1969 and discusses meeting Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins. Gregory discusses the 1986 Space Shuttle Challenger accident in which all seven astronauts onboard were killed. For the fateful flight, he was the Lead Capsule Communicator in mission control. He felt as if he lost family and reflects on each of the astronauts, who had been training with him for years. Gregory describes his experiences of being in space, which made it seem like everyone on Earth were neighbors. As a result, he began traveling around the world. On a trip to Madagascar, he discovered an oral history which was similar to his family history, about a prince who had immigrated to the United States.

African American astronauts.
Challenger (Spacecraft)--Accidents.
Space race--United States.
Apollo 11 (Spacecraft).
Armstrong, Neil, 1930-.
Aldrin, Buzz.
Collins, Michael, 1930-.
African American families.
African Americans--Relations with Africans.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007_215_001_006,
TRT: 0:22:26 2007/07/27

Col. Frederick Gregory discusses his work as an astronaut and NASA administrator. In 1989, he assumed the command of a NASA mission in 1989, making him the first African American commander. After flying three space missions, he accepted a position as deputy administrator in charge of safety at NASA before retiring in 2005. He discusses the people he has met throughout his career, including Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. He reflects on retirement and the additional time he is able to spend with his wife and family. Gregory wants to be remembered as someone who has given more to the next generation than was given to him. He advises the next generation to become a jack-of-all-trades and not to decide too early what to do with their lives. He is disappointed that the United States is becoming more of a service provider than a risk-taker in new technology.

African American astronauts.
Reagan, Ronald.
Bush, George, 1924-. 