

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Lewis, Roosevelt J., 1943-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis,
Dates:	September 6, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:17:22).
Abstract:	Colonel and federal government appointee Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis (1943 -) served the United States in five Pentagon positions, including the Office of the Secretary of Defense. He is chairman and CEO of Air Tuskegee Ltd. and Global One Jets. He is also the owner of Moton Field, where most of the Tuskegee Airmen were trained as pilots. Lewis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 6, 2007, in Tuskegee, Alabama. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_246
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Colonel and federal government appointee Roosevelt Joseph Lewis, Jr. was born on August 25, 1943, in Greenville, Alabama to Clara Nell Mitchell Lewis and Roosevelt Joseph Lewis, Sr. Lewis and his family moved to Toulminville, Alabama when he was four years old; and he graduated as valedictorian from Heart of Mary High School in 1960. In 1964, Lewis received his B.S. degree in chemistry from Tuskegee University (formerly the Tuskegee Institute) in Tuskegee, Alabama. He earned his M.A. degree in transportation and business management from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

While attending Tuskegee University, Lewis enrolled in the United States Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps and met aviation pioneer Alfred "Chief" Anderson, who was the chief flight instructor and mentor to the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II. By 1968, Lewis gained recognition for his superior performance in the ROTC and was elected "Best Major in Command" by his unit in 1968, 1969, 1982 and 1988.

Lewis served the United States government's Department of Defense in five Pentagon positions, including the Office of the Secretary of Defense. As the chief of Vehicle Programs, he purchased the \$3.4 billion vehicle fleet for the U.S. Air Force and managed a \$34.8 billion budget as Executive Officer of the Logistics Engineering branch, Headquarters U.S. Air Force.

Lewis was a presidential scholar at the University of Alabama and served as a congressional intern with the Public Works & Transportation Committee for the U.S. House of Representatives. Lewis has also taught transportation courses for Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and the University of Maryland. In addition, he was previously former secretary of the Alabama Aeronautics Commission.

Since his retirement in 1991, Lewis has focused his efforts on aviation training for new pilots and has guided over 300 of them in obtaining their licenses. Lewis also serves as chairman and CEO of Air Tuskegee Ltd. and Global

One Jets. He also owns historic Moton Field, where most of the Tuskegee Airmen, including his mentor, “Chief” Anderson, learned how to fly. Roosevelt Joseph Lewis Jr., was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 6, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis was conducted by Denise Gines on September 6, 2007, in Tuskegee, Alabama, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Colonel and federal government appointee Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis (1943 -) served the United States in five Pentagon positions, including the Office of the Secretary of Defense. He is chairman and CEO of Air Tuskegee Ltd. and Global One Jets. He is also the owner of Moton Field, where most of the Tuskegee Airmen were trained as pilots.

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:

Lewis, Roosevelt J., 1943-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Lewis, Roosevelt J., 1943- --Interviews

Air pilots, Military--Interviews

Armed Forces--Officers--Interviews

United States. Dept. of Defense--Officials and employees--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. Air Force.

Department of Defense

Occupations:

Colonel

Federal Government Appointee

HistoryMakers® Category:

MilitaryMakers|PoliticalMakers

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 Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis, September 6, 2007. 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 Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis, Section A2007_246_001_001, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis was born on August 25, 1943 in Greenville, Alabama to Clara Nell Lewis and Roosevelt J. Lewis, Sr. Lewis has Native American and European heritage on both sides of his family. His paternal great-grandmother, Lula Lewis, was a young girl during the Civil War and lived to be 117 years old. Lewis also describes his maternal family background. His maternal grandmother, Martha Stinson Mitchell, married twice: her first husband was Tommy Scott (ph.) and her second husband was John Mitchell. The Mitchells were tenant farmers on the Williams Plantation in Greenville, which was a farm community. As the oldest of fourteen children, Lewis' mother, helped raise her younger siblings. Lewis talks about his mother's childhood, her talent for sewing, and her generous nature. Lewis' mother raised eight children at home and his father was a laborer at the International Paper Company. Lewis' family owned a large home Mobile, Alabama's Toulminville neighborhood.

African American families--Alabama.

Family reunions--Alabama.

African American parents--Attitudes.

Genealogy.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis, Section A2007_246_001_002, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis talks about his maternal ancestors who were tenant farmers on the Williams Plantation in Greenville, Alabama. His ancestors, who were the product of miscegenation with the plantation owners, took on the last name Adams, and were able to frequent department stores in town. Lewis' father, Roosevelt J. Lewis, Sr., was born out of wedlock and raised by his mother, Rosie Lewis, and his grandmother, Lula Lewis, in Greenville, Alabama. Lewis' paternal great-grandfather, Bully (ph.) Lewis was killed in World War I. As a child, Lewis' father had a penchant for fishing. As an adult, he received several medals for his service as a medic in World War II, but was reticent to speak about his military career. Before and after his military service, Lewis' father worked at the International Paper Company where he trained black and white laborers. However, his rise up the ranks was opposed by black and white unions alike. Lewis also talks about his father's passing and his respect for his parents.

World War, 1939-1945--Veterans.

African American soldiers.

African American fathers.

African American families.

Veterans--Mental health--United States.

Post-traumatic stress disorder.

International Paper Company--Employees.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis, Section A2007_246_001_003, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis' paternal great-grandfather Bully (ph.) Lewis was an entrepreneur who owned a large parcel of land in Butler County, Alabama. However, after he was killed in World War II, his wife, Lula Lewis, was cheated out of the land by a local lawyer. Lewis also talks about his parents' courtship and the family's move to Mobile, Alabama where his father worked for the International Paper Company before serving in World War II as a medic in the U.S. Army. Lewis describes his early childhood which was spent on his maternal grandparents' farm in Greenville, Alabama while his father was at war. His early years on the farm allowed Lewis to discern that he did not want to be a farmer. Lewis describes his memory of meeting his father at the age of five after his father returned from the war. After his return, Lewis' father bought a large farmhouse in Mobile, Alabama's Toulminville neighborhood and returned to the International Paper Company while also working as a stevedore.

Sharecropping--Alabama.

African American children--Alabama.

World War, 1939-1945--Veterans.

African American families.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis, Section A2007_246_001_004, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis describes the occupations and marriages of his seven siblings. His sister, Gloriest Evona Lewis, died in a house fire at the age of eleven. Another sister, Chinaester Marie was arrested several times for her participation in the Civil Rights Movement and later became a minister. After Lewis' father returned from serving as an U.S. Army medic in World War II, the family moved into Toulminville, which was a family-oriented suburb of Mobile, Alabama. At the time, there were very few black families in the neighborhood; one of the families was the Aaron family. Lewis remembers watching his neighbor, Hank Aaron, play broom ball before Aaron became a baseball star. Lewis also describes the sights, sounds, and smells of his childhood, the stores and schools in Toulminville, and his childhood experiences of segregation in Mobile. He remembers learning how to play tennis.

African American neighborhoods--Alabama.

Aaron, Hank, 1934-.

African American baseball players.

African American children.

Mobile (Ala.)--Race relations.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis, Section A2007_246_001_005, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis attended Toulminville Elementary School in Toulminville, Alabama, which was originally a one-room Rosenwald schoolhouse. In seventh and eighth grades, Lewis attended St. James Major Catholic School in Prichard, Alabama. He talks about his Catholic education and his family's conversion to Catholicism. In addition to serving in the U.S. Army, Lewis' father also worked for the International Paper Company. The G.I. Bill allowed his father to obtain a degree in cosmetology. Lewis then attended Heart

of Mary High School in Mobile, Alabama, graduating in 1960. In 1959, a fire in the family home led to the death of Lewis' sister, Gloriest Evona Lewis. Lewis describes the result of his sister's death on his family and its impact on his decision to attend the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama. Lewis enrolled at Tuskegee on scholarship in 1960. Soon after arriving on campus, Lewis met C. Alfred "Chief" Anderson, who was the Chief Flight Instructor of the Tuskegee Airmen.

African American schools--Southern States--History--20th century.

African American students--Education (Secondary).

Julius Rosenwald Fund--Buildings.

Fires--Casualties--Alabama.

Catholic high schools--Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis, Section A2007_246_001_006, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis remembers his first flight with C. Alfred "Chief" Anderson, whom he met shortly after arriving at the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama in 1960. The flight sparked Lewis' passion for aviation. Lewis describes Anderson's historic achievements in the field of aviation and his role as the Chief Flight Instructor of the Tuskegee Airmen. While a student at the Tuskegee Institute Lewis was a member of the tennis team and an Air Force ROTC cadet. After graduating in 1965, Lewis went directly into the U.S. Air Force. He describes his early military career from pilot training at Williams Air Force Base to serving as a staff officer at Scott Air Force Base. Looking back upon his youth, Lewis remembers being attacked by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) as a teenager in Mobile, Alabama. Although many of Lewis' peers at Tuskegee went to Selma, Lewis did not participate in the Civil Rights Movement because he did not believe he could be nonviolent after his interactions with the KKK.

Tuskegee University.

Civil rights movements--History--20th century.

United States. Air Force.

Ku Klux Klan (1915-).

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis, Section A2007_246_001_007, TRT: 0:28:32 ?

Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis abstained from active participation in the Civil Rights Movement after enduring several near death experiences motivated by racism. In one instance, Lewis was shot at while working for The Tuskegee Institute Summer Education Program. Lewis talks about his career in the U.S. Air Force. After spending a year stationed in Thailand from 1969 to 1970, Lewis returned to Scott Air Force Base in Illinois as the motor vehicle division staff officer. Lewis married his wife, Carolyn Lewis, in 1973, and received his master's degree in transportation and business management from the University of Alabama in 1976. Lewis' relationship with C. Alfred "Chief" Anderson connected him to Tuskegee Airmen across the country. While an intern at the Public Works and Transportation Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives, Lewis was involved in the East Coast Chapter of Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. He talks about the impact of the Tuskegee Airmen and his role in preserving the Airmen's legacy.

Civil rights movements--History--20th century.

United States. Air Force.

United States. Army Air Forces. Fighter Group, 332nd.

University of Alabama.

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, African American.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis, Section A2007_246_001_008, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis served on the Public Works and Transportation Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives after receiving a master's degree from the University of Alabama in 1976. He then served in five positions at the Pentagon including chief of vehicle programs as well as executive officer for logistics and engineering for the U.S. Air Force. Lewis was stationed at Clark Air Base in the Philippines from 1986 to 1989 where he oversaw the Department of Defense's air lift operation and mobility program and oversaw Operation Earnest Will. Lewis remembers his father's pride in his achievements and his promotion to colonel. He recounts the influence of the Tuskegee Airmen in his U.S. Air Force career and his recruitment by C. Alfred "Chief" Anderson to help retain Moton Field. Upon his return to Tuskegee, Lewis helped re-secure the airport license, and also became a professor of air science. Lewis describes his aviation students and the creation of the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site in 1998.

Military operations, strategy and tactics.

Tuskegee University--Faculty.

African American fighterpilots.

Interns (Legislation)--Washington, D.C.

Operation Earnest Will, 1987-1988.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis, Section A2007_246_001_009, TRT: 0:24:50 ?

Col. Roosevelt J. Lewis describes how he advocated for the C. Alfred "Chief" Anderson Department of Aviation at Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama. Several of his students at Tuskegee University went on to lead successful careers at companies like Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and NASA. Lewis' parents and C. Alfred "Chief" Anderson left an indelible impression in his life. He also talks about his hopes and concerns for the African American community, his advice for the younger generation and his own legacy. Lewis concludes his interview by narrating his personal photographs.

Tuskegee University.

African American youth--Education.

United States. Army Air Forces. Fighter Group, 332nd.