

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Gen. Julius Becton, Jr.

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## 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>	Becton, Julius W. (Julius Wesley) 1926-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Julius Becton, Jr.,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 27, 2012 and February 14, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2012 and 2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	11 uncompressed MOV digital video files (5:28:58).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Military officer Gen. Julius Becton, Jr. (1926 - ) , was a retired Lieutenant General and the first African American officer to command a Corps in the U.S. Army (VII U.S. Corps). Becton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 27, 2012 and February 14, 2013, in Fort Belvoir, Virginia and Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2012_227
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Military Officer and federal government administrator Julius W. Becton, Jr. was born on June 29, 1926 in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania to Julius Wesley and Rose Banks Becton. He joined the Army Air Corps in July 1944 and graduated from Infantry Officer Candidate School in 1945. While on active duty, Becton graduated from Prairie View A & M College in 1960 with his B.S. degree in mathematics and the University of Maryland in 1966 with his M.A. degree in economics. He is also a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, the Armed Forces Staff College and the National War College. Post his military service, Becton has received honorary doctorate degrees from Huston-Tillotson College, Muhlenberg College, Prairie View A & M University, The Citadel, Dickinson College, and American Public University System.

Becton joined the 93rd Infantry Division in the Pacific at the end of World War II and was separated from the Army in 1946, but returned to active duty after President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981 to desegregate the military in 1948. Rising to the rank of Lieutenant General in 1978 he commanded the 1st Cavalry Division, the United States Army Operations Test and Evaluation Agency, and the VII Corps – the Army’s largest combat corps in Europe during the Cold War. Becton also served in the Korean War and the Vietnam War, and retired from the U.S. Army in 1983 after nearly 40 years of service. However, his public service career was far from over.

From 1984 to 1985, he served as the director of the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance in the United States Agency for International Development. He then served as the third director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency from 1985 to 1989 under President Ronald Reagan. In his mid-sixties, Becton began a new career, that of education administrator. From 1989 to 1994, he was the fifth president of Prairie View A & M University, his alma mater – becoming the first graduate of Prairie View A & M University to attain flag rank in the military. In 1996, he became the superintendent of the Washington, D.C. public school system.

Among his decorations are the Distinguished Service Medal, two Silver Stars, two Legion of Merit medals and two

Purple Hearts, along with the Knight Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of Germany. Becton married to Louise Thornton, and they have five children: Shirley, Karen, Joyce, Renee, and Wesley. They also have eleven grandchildren and three great grandchildren

Julius W. Becton, Jr. was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 27, 2012.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Gen. Julius Becton, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 27, 2012 and February 14, 2013, in Fort Belvoir, Virginia and Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 11 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Military officer Gen. Julius Becton, Jr. (1926 - ) , was a retired Lieutenant General and the first African American officer to command a Corps in the U.S. Army (VII U.S. Corps).

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Becton, Julius W. (Julius Wesley) 1926-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Becton, Julius W. (Julius Wesley) 1926---Interviews

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

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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United States. Army

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## Occupations:

Military Officer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MilitaryMakers

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## 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 Gen. Julius Becton, Jr., August 27, 2012 and February 14, 2013. 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

## Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Julius Becton, Jr., Section A2012\_227\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:06 ?

Julius Becton describes his family's background. His mother, Rose Inez Banks, was born in October, 1900 in Caroline County, Virginia. She grew up on her father's, Round Banks' farm; attended school until the tenth grade; and then moved to Philadelphia in the early 1920s. Becton's father, Julius Wesley Becton, Sr., was born in January, 1897, in Craven County, North Carolina, and also moved to Philadelphia in the 1920s. In this section of the interview, Becton describes his parents' personalities, his mother's love of sports, and his father's strong work ethic. He talks about his father's career as the janitorial manager of an apartment building that he helped build in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. Becton also describes growing up in Bryn Mawr, where he spent his entire childhood.

African American families.

African American mothers--Virginia.

African American fathers--North Carolina.

Childhood--Pennsylvania.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Julius Becton, Jr., Section A2012\_227\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:13 ?

Julius Becton was raised in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, where he attended Bryn Mawr Grammar School. He describes his experience in school, where he excelled academically. He also talks about his progression through school including the Lower Marion Junior High School which was later renamed Ardmore Junior High School. Inspired by the local doctor, Becton wanted to attend medical school. He took his first college course while stationed in the U.S. Army in the Philippines. In 1960, he attended Muhlenberg College, and later completed his B.A. degree in mathematics from Prairie View A&M University. Becton describes growing up in Bryn Mawr, where segregation was not a law, but existed as a social norm. He also talks about his childhood jobs; his brother, Joseph William Becton; his father, Julius Wesley Becton, Sr., who was his role model, as well as his father's salary which supported their entire family.

Childhood--Pennsylvania.

Education, Primary--Pennsylvania.

Philippines.

Prairie View A & M University.

Segregation--Pennsylvania.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Julius Becton, Jr., Section A2012\_227\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:24 ?

Julius Becton attended Lower Marion High School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, where he was involved in sports. In 1941, at the age of sixteen, he joined the Civil Air Patrol. Becton went on to join the Army Air Corp Enlisted Reserve in 1943, and attended Officer Candidate School (OCS) in 1944. He discusses the integrated environment of Army schools in the 1940s, contrasts it to the deeply segregated civilian society in the South, and the changes that have occurred over time. Becton describes his first overseas assignment in the Philippines in 1945, his separation from the military in 1946, and attending Muhlenberg College on a football scholarship. After losing his scholarship due to an injury, Becton's education was supported by the GI Bill. He also talks about meeting his wife

while they were in high school, his father's political affiliation, his desire to become a pilot, and his involvement with Saints Memorial Baptist Church.

Education, Secondary--Pennsylvania.

Military education--History.

Philippines.

Muhlenberg College.

African American churches--Pennsylvania.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Julius Becton, Jr., Section A2012\_227\_001\_004, TRT: 4:32:43 ?

Julius Becton attended Muhlenberg College from 1946 to 1948. He played football on the college team until an injury cost him his football scholarship. In 1948, the same year that he married his wife, Louise, and segregation officially ended in the U.S. Army, Becton returned to the service. In 1949, he was integrated into the Regular Army, becoming a permanent member. In 1950, he was assigned to the 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Division to fight in the Korean War. He describes his experience in Korea, and how his unit was integrated in the midst of the war. Becton discusses the details of his assignments after returning from Korea, including his successful three-year tour at Mainz, Gonsenheim, Germany. In 1957, he joined Prairie View A&M University as an assistant professor of military science, and earned his B.A. degree in mathematics. In 1960, he went on to Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth. He also talks about his parents' support of his finances.

Muhlenberg College.

Marriage.

United States. Army.

Korean War, 1950-1953.

United States. Army. European Command.

Prairie View A & M University.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Julius Becton, Jr., Section A2012\_227\_001\_005, TRT: 5:29:00 ?

Julius Becton joined Prairie View A&M University as an assistant professor of military science in 1957. He earned his B.A. degree in mathematics. In 1960, he went on to Command General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and was then assigned to duty in France. After his return to the U.S., Becton attended a six-month officers' training course at the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia, where, because of race, had difficulty finding a house for his family. In 1966, he received his master's degree in economics from the University of Maryland, and was assigned to join the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam in 1967.

Prairie View A & M University.

United States.--Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.

United States. Army. European Command.

Armed Forces Staff College (U.S.)

University of Maryland (College Park, Md.).

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Julius Becton, Jr., Section A2012\_227\_001\_006, TRT: 6:30:12 ?

In 1967, Julius Becton was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division in the Vietnam War. He discusses the war, race relations in the U.S. Army, his service,

get-togethers of his command staff, and his thirteen-point management philosophy of commanding troops. In 1969, he was selected to the National War College. He describes his training and his role in General Colin Powell's selection there a few years later. Upon graduation, Becton was assigned as the brigade commander of the 2nd Brigade, Second Armor Division in Fort Hood, Texas. In 1972, he was also selected as the Branch Chief of Armor. Becton left this position in August, 1972, and was promoted to become the sixth African American brigadier general in the U.S. Army. He went on to serve as deputy commander at Fort Dix, New Jersey. Becton also reflects upon women in the military between the 1970s and 2012.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

United States Armed Forces--African Americans.

National War College (U.S.)

Fort Hood (Tex.)

Fort Dix (N.J.)

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Julius Becton, Jr., Section A2012\_227\_001\_007, TRT: 7:29:55 ?

Julius Becton was appointed as the deputy commander of training at Fort Dix, New Jersey, in 1972, and as the division commander of the First Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, Texas in 1974. Becton describes his experience and talks about his accident while riding a horse at a parade/ceremony at Fort Hood. From 1976 to 1978, he served as the commander of the Operational Test and Evaluation Unit (OTEA). Becton was then appointed as the commander of the U.S. VII Corps in Germany, the U.S. Army's largest force stationed in Cold War Europe. After his return to the U.S. in 1981, he became the Deputy Commander of Training for TRADOC and the Army Inspector of Training. Becton retired from the Army in 1983, and went on to serve as the director of the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance for U.S. AID, and the director of FEMA. He also talks about the role of mentoring in the Army and being featured as one of the '100 Most Influential Blacks' by 'Ebony Magazine'.

Fort Dix (N.J.)

Fort Hood (Tex.)

United States. Army. European Command.

Cold War.

United States.--Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Julius Becton, Jr., Section A2012\_227\_002\_008, TRT: 8:31:37 ?

Julius Becton retired from the U.S. Army as a three-star lieutenant general in 1982. He describes the ceremony that honored his retirement as an emotional one. Becton went on to become the director of the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance in the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), where he served for twenty-two months. In 1985, he was appointed as the director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Becton describes FEMA's role in facilitating disaster relief, his experience serving for FEMA, and the standing of FEMA since his tenure as its director. Becton served with FEMA until 1989, and was then selected to become the president of Prairie View A&M University in Texas. In this section of the interview, he also reflects upon the status of African Americans and women in the U.S. Army, and the repeal of the U.S. military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy in 2010.

Retired military personnel--United States.

African American generals.

International relief--Government policy--United States.

United States.--Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Prairie View A & M University.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Julius Becton, Jr., Section A2012\_227\_002\_009, TRT: 9:29:06 ?

In 1989, Julius Becton was selected to become the president of Prairie View A and M University, at a financially challenging period for the institution. He describes the reason for his selection, and his experience there. Becton also discusses Prairie View's reputation for generating engineers, nurses, teachers, and high ranking military officers through their Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) programs. He retired from this position and returned to Springfield, Virginia in 1994, and then became the superintendent of the Washington, District of Columbia public school system in 1996. Becton describes his experience and the continued challenges that are faced by the D.C. school system. He also talks about his life after retirement in 1998.

Prairie View A & M University.

Education--Washington (D.C.).

Retirement--African Americans.

Reminiscing.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Julius Becton, Jr., Section A2012\_227\_002\_010, TRT: 10:29:57 ?

In this section of the interview, Julius Becton reflects upon his life and career, his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and the crises in urban education and physical and behavioral health in the United States. Becton also talks about his family, his former colleague, educator Arlene Ackerman, and the prospects for young people who are interested in joining the military. In 2007, Becton received a George Catlett Marshall Medal from the Association of the United States Army (AUSA). He also mentions the fall gathering of African American Flag Officers and being honored by the Buffalo Soldiers. Becton's autobiography, entitled, 'Becton: Autobiography of a Soldier and Public Servant', was published by the Naval Institute Press in 2008.

Reminiscing.

Education--United States.

Awards.

African American families.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Julius Becton, Jr., Section A2012\_227\_002\_011, TRT: 11:28:45 ?

In this final section of the interview, Julius Becton reflects upon his life and career and shares how he would like to be remembered. He talks about his parents, Rose Inex Banks Becton and Julius Wesley Becton, Sr., and his relative, HistoryMaker Themla Groomes. Becton closes the interview by describing his photographs.

Photographs.