

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lt. Gen. Willie Williams

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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>	Williams, Willie J., 1951-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Willie Williams,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 11, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	9 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:05:06).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Lieutenant general Lt. Gen. Willie Williams (1951 - ) was the first African American to be appointed as the director of the U.S. Marine Corps staff at Marine Corps headquarters. Williams was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 11, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_042
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Willie Williams was commissioned into the U.S. Marine Corps in May of 1974 after graduating with his B.A. degree in business administration from Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Williams also received his M.A. degree in business administration from National University in San Diego, California in 1992 and his M.A. degree in strategic resources management from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces in 1994. He is also a graduate of the Armed Forces Staff College and the Amphibious Warfare School.

Williams began his career with the 11th Marine Artillery Regiment, serving first as a battalion supply officer and then as the regimental supply officer. In October 1977, Williams was assigned to the 3rd Force Service Support Group based in Iwakuni, Japan. After serving in Iwakuni, Williams returned to the U.S. for duty at the Marine Barracks at North Island, San Diego, California. While there, Williams served as the detachment supply officer and barracks executive officer. In June 1982, he reported to Quantico, Virginia for duty as platoon commander in the Officer Candidate School. In 1988, Williams deployed as the logistics officer with the Contingency Marine Air Ground Task Force 3-88 during its Persian Gulf Deployment. He was assigned to joint duty with the Department of Defense Inspector General's Office in January 1990. Williams was appointed as commander of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit Service Support Group from 1994 to 1996. In June 1997, Williams departed for duty in Okinawa, Japan with the 1st Force Service Support Group. Initially, Williams was assigned as the assistant chief of staff; but, in 1998, he was promoted to commanding officer of the Brigade Service Support Group. He returned to Okinawa, Japan in 2000 as the commanding general of the Marine Corps Base at Camp Smedley D. Butler, and then as the commanding general of the 3rd Force Service Support Group. From 2003 to 2005, Williams served as the assistant deputy commandant of Installations and Logistics at the U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters. In 2011, Williams became the director of the Marine Corps staff at Marine Corps Headquarters, making him third in the chain of command for the entire Marine Corps, behind only the commandant and the assistant commandant.

Williams military honors include the Legion of Merit with a gold star, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medals, the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, the Humanitarian Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, and the Department of Defense Service Badge. Williams received an Honorary Doctorate of Law from Stillman College, and an Honorary Doctorate of Philosophy from Albany State University.

Lt. Gen. Willie Williams was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 11, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lt. Gen. Willie Williams was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 11, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Lieutenant general Lt. Gen.

Willie Williams (1951 - ) was the first African American to be appointed as the director of the U.S. Marine Corps staff at Marine Corps headquarters.

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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:

Williams, Willie J., 1951-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Williams, Willie J., 1951---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. Marine Corps

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## **Occupations:**

Lieutenant General

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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 Lt. Gen. Willie

Williams, February 11, 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 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).

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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 Lt. Gen. Willie Williams, Section A2013\_042\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:26 2013/02/11

Willie Williams describes his family's background. Williams' mother, Ella Mae Bolden Hill was born on June 1, 1929, in Livingston, Alabama. She attended school until the tenth grade, when she had her first child. Ella Hill raised five children, and worked as a domestic. Williams' father, Herman Jones, was also born in Livingston. Williams talks about his paternal family's history of slavery and land ownership, and their livelihood from their land. His family owned land that was believed to be passed down by Williams' great-grandfather, who was likely the son of a white slave-owner. He describes his father's life in Alabama, where farming allowed him to provide for his family. He also talks about the resourcefulness of his maternal uncle, Henry, who ran a successful farming practice. Williams discusses his parents' relationship as well as his siblings.

African American families.

African American mothers--Alabama.

African American fathers--Alabama.

Slavery--Alabama.

Farm life--Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Willie Williams, Section  
A2013\_042\_001\_002, TRT: 2:31:51 2013/02/11

Willie Williams' mother Ella Mae Bolden Hill, raised five children as a single parent. Williams discusses his biological parents' relationship, his mother's relationships while he was growing up, and the origin of his last name of "Williams." His family moved from Livingston to Epes, Theodore and Moundville, Alabama so that they could stay near their relatives. He describes growing up in the nurturing community of Moundville, from the sixth grade through high school. Williams began school in Epes and then attended Mary Weeks Burroughs Elementary School in Theodore, before moving to Moundville. He describes the positive experience he had at school, and talks about his teachers. Williams' family attended First Baptist Church of Moundville. He talks about his likeness to his parents, his mother's influence on him, baseball players from Mobile County, growing up without television, electricity or running water, and the person he met from the military, while growing up.

African American mothers--Alabama.

Childhood--Alabama.

African American families.

Alabama--Social life and customs.

African American churches--Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Willie Williams, Section  
A2013\_042\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:09 2013/02/11

Willie Williams was raised in Alabama, where his family moved from Livingston to Epes, Theodore, and later gained a sense of stability in Moundville. Williams attended Moundville Public School, where his favorite subject was math. He talks about his lifelong friends, Clifton Bates and Herbert Felton, and the time they spent together repairing and driving old cars. Williams was the

first in his family to attend college. He recalls how his teachers and principal, Norman Cephus, convinced him and his friends to pursue a college degree. After graduating from high school in 1970, Williams, Bates and Felton attended Stillman College in Tuscaloosa. He describes his experience in college, where he pledged Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, and worked forty-eight hours at a local textile company called Olympia Mills. Williams also talks about meeting his future wife at Olympia Mills, his brother Willis' career, his childhood jobs, and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama.

Childhood--Alabama.

Education--Alabama.

Stillman Institute (Tuscaloosa, Ala.)

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity.

College students--Employment.

Marriage.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Willie Williams, Section A2013\_042\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:56 2013/02/11

From 1970 to 1974, Willie Williams attended Stillman College, where he majored in business administration and minored in accounting. He recalls the support that he received from the faculty while worked long hours to pay for his education. While at Stillman, Williams was introduced to the U.S. Marines in 1972. He then enrolled in the Platoon Leaders Class (PLC) program at Quantico, Virginia, and decided to join the Marines after graduation in 1974. Williams went on to supply school, and was then assigned to aid the Vietnamese refugee camp at Camp Pendleton, California. In 1976, he extended his service with a regular commission assignment as the Officer-in-Charge of the Inventory Control Point in Iwakuni, Japan with the 3rd Force Service Support Group. He describes his exposure to Japanese culture. Williams also discusses the role and structure of the U.S. Marines.

Stillman Institute (Tuscaloosa, Ala.)

United States. Marine Corps.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

Air bases, American--Japan--Iwakuni-shi.

## Camp Pendleton (Calif.)

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Willie Williams, Section  
A2013\_042\_001\_005, TRT: 5:28:43 2013/02/11

From 1978 to 1982, Willie Williams served at the Marine Barracks in San Diego, California, where he became the Barracks Executive Officer. From 1982 to 1985, he served as the platoon commander at Officer Candidate School, attended the Amphibious Warfare School, and was assigned to the Mountain Warfare Training Center as a supply officer. In 1985, he was assigned as the assistant division supply officer for the 3rd Marine Division in Okinawa, Japan. While there, he became involved in Operation Earnest Will in the Persian Gulf. Between 1989 and 1994, Williams attended the Armed Forces Staff College, the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, and served in the Department of Defense Inspector General's Office. Then, from 1994 to 1996, he served as commander of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit in Okinawa, and as assistant chief of Staff, 3rd Force Service Support Group. Williams also talks experiencing racism off base in the hills of Nevada, and the close-knit Marine Corps.

Marine Corps Recruit Depot (San Diego, Calif.)

United States. Army. Officer Candidate School.

Okinawa Island (Japan)

Persian Gulf War, 1991.

Military education--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Willie Williams, Section  
A2013\_042\_001\_006, TRT: 6:28:31 2013/02/11

In 1994, Williams assumed command of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) Service Support Group, and subsequently served as the assistant chief of staff of the 3rd Force Service Support Group. He describes his visit to China with the MEU and to Russia while at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. In 1997, Williams was assigned to the 1st Force Service Support Group at Camp Pendleton, California. In 1998, Williams was assigned as the commanding officer of Brigade Service Support Group. He describes his group's mission in Kenya, the reception that his team received there, the Black Hawk



Down in Somalia, and the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM). From 2001 to 2003, Williams returned to Okinawa as the commanding general of the 3rd Force Service Support Group. He also reflects on the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the U.S. Marines' efforts at stability in the Pacific afterwards.

United States. Marine Corps.

Camp Pendleton (Calif.)

Military assistance, American--Kenya--Management.

Okinawa Island (Japan)

September 11 Terrorist Attacks, 2001.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Willie Williams, Section A2013\_042\_001\_007, TRT: 7:30:43 2013/02/11

In 2005, Willie Williams was appointed as the Commander of Marine Corps Logistics Command in Albany, Georgia. Then, in 2009, he was appointed as Director of Marine Corps Staff at the Pentagon, serving as the third highest ranking officer in the U.S. Marine Corps. Williams describes his role, reflects upon the social issues in the Marine Corps, programs that help Marines achieve a balance in life, and the chain of command in the U.S. armed forces. In 2008, Williams volunteered as a component commander at President Barack Obama's inauguration parade, rendering his first salute as Commander-in-Chief. He talks about the legacy of the Montford Point Marines, the first African Americans in the U.S. Marine Corps. Williams also describes the work of the Montford Point Marine Association in the Congressional Gold Medal given to the Montford Point Marines.

United States. Marine Corps.

Pentagon (Va.).

Obama, Barack.

Montford Point Camp (Camp Lejeune, N.C.).

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Willie Williams, Section A2013\_042\_001\_008, TRT: 8:27:48 2013/02/11

In this closing section of the interview, Willie Williams reflects upon his life and career, his wife and their forty-one year-long marriage, the death of his daughter, and his

family in Alabama, including his siblings and half-siblings. He talks about the significance of Sergeant Major Gilbert “Hashmark” Johnson, who paved the way for blacks in the U.S. Armed Services, and reflects upon African Americans in the U.S. Marines. Williams also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, his plans for retirement and how he would like to be remembered.

Reminiscing.

Marriage.

African American families.

Death and remembrance.

Video Oral History Interview with Lt. Gen. Willie Williams, Section A2013\_042\_001\_009, TRT: 9:10:59 2013/02/11

Willie Williams describes his photographs.

Photographs.