

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sgt. Maj. Alford McMichael

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	McMichael, Alford L.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sgt. Maj. Alford McMichael,
Dates:	May 22, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:25:57).
Abstract:	Sergeant Sgt. Maj. Alford McMichael (1952 -) was named 14th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps on July 1, 1999, becoming the first African American to hold the post. McMichael was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 22, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_122
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

U.S. Marine Corps Sergeant Major Alford L. McMichael was born on February 24, 1952 in Hot Springs, Arkansas. After graduating from Hot Springs High School, McMichael enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps on August 27, 1970 at the Recruit Depot in San Diego California. McMichael completed Infantry Training School and Basic Infantry Training in 1971 at Camp Pendleton, California and went on to graduate from Staff Noncommissioned Officers Academy Advanced School and the Marine Security Guard School.

In 1973, McMichael was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines at Camp Pendleton. He returned to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego in December of 1973 where he served as a drill instructor, a series gunnery sergeant, and a battalion drill master. After completing Marine Security Guard School in 1979, McMichael was assigned to the American Embassy in Copenhagen, Denmark. In December of 1984, he transferred to Okinawa, Japan to serve as the First Sergeant of Company C, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion. McMichael was appointed deputy director of the Staff Noncommissioned Officers Academy at the Marine Corps Air Station in El Toro, California in 1988 and served there as director from 1989 to 1991.

McMichael was transferred to Quantico for a three-year stint as the Sergeant Major of Officer Candidates School and then deployed to Okinawa, Japan where he served as the Sergeant Major of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit until 1995. McMichael then served as the Sergeant Major of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing from 1997 to 1999, and then the Sergeant Major for Manpower and Reserve Affairs Division at the U.S.M.C. Headquarters. On July 1, 1999, McMichael was named 14th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, becoming the first African American to hold the post. Under his leadership, the Marine Corps saw the establishment of the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program and the commencement of the Global War on Terrorism. Deferring his planned retirement in 2003, McMichael was appointed to the newly-created post of Senior Non-Commissioned Officer for Allied Command Operations, and served in there until July 17, 2006.

McMichael's military honors include the Navy Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal, the Navy & Marine Corps Commendation Medal, Navy & Marine Corps Achievement Medal, and the National Defense Service Medal. His memoirs were published under the title *Leadership: Achieving Life-Changing Success From Within* (2008).

U.S. Marine Corps Sargent Major Alford L. McMichael was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 22, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sgt. Maj. Alford McMichael was conducted by Larry Crowe on May 22, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Sergeant Sgt. Maj. Alford McMichael (1952 -) was named 14th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps on July 1, 1999, becoming the first African American to hold the post.

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:

McMichael, Alford L.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

McMichael, Alford L.--Interviews

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

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Sergeant

HistoryMakers® Category:

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

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sgt. Maj. Alford McMichael, May 22, 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).

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 Sgt. Maj. Alford McMichael, Section A2013_122_001_001,
TRT: 1:28:57 ?

Alford McMichael describes his maternal family's history. McMichael's mother, Rosa McMichael, was born in the 1920s in Hot Springs, Arkansas, to Ida Taubert (ph.) and Sherman McMichael. McMichael talks about growing up in his grandmother's home and her influence in his life. He describes her as the strength of her family and talks about how she saved her family's home from foreclosure. McMichael also describes the resort town of Hot Springs as the hub for entertainment and tourism until the late 1960s, when gambling was outlawed by the city. He describes his grandfather's reputation in the town, and how the community remembered him more than twenty years after his death.

African American families--Arkansas.

African American mothers--Arkansas.

African American grandparents--Arkansas.

Hot Springs (Ark.)--Social life and customs.

Video Oral History Interview with Sgt. Maj. Alford McMichael, Section A2013_122_001_002,
TRT: 2:28:13 ?

Alford McMichael and his siblings were raised by their mother and grandmother in Hot Springs, Arkansas. McMichael did not grow up knowing his father; he was raised in his grandmother's home. He talks about his mother raising ten children by herself, working two jobs, ensuring that her children had everything that they needed, and being respected by their community. He recalls his family's meal times, his mother's cooking, and spending time with his grandmother as she tended to the family's animals and garden. McMichael started school in the late 1950s at Goldstein Elementary School in Hot Springs, where his favorite subjects were history and civics. He describes his experience in school and talks about his second grade teacher, Ms. Johnson.

African American families--Arkansas.

Single-parent families.

Childhood--Arkansas.

African American mothers--Arkansas.

African American grandmothers--Arkansas.

Education, Primary--Arkansas.

Video Oral History Interview with Sgt. Maj. Alford McMichael, Section A2013_122_001_003,
TRT: 3:31:08 ?

Alford McMichael was raised in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and describes the "separate but not segregated" community in the city in the 1960s. He attended Langston High School, where he played football, and in 1969, following the peaceful integration of schools, he began to attend Hot Springs High School. McMichael talks about attending Baptist church while growing up, and recalls the National Baptist Conventions in his hometown. He also discusses black establishments in Hot Springs, voting rights for African Americans in Arkansas, and the cordial race relations in the city even prior to the passage of the Civil Rights Bill. McMichael describes his academics in high school, playing on the football team, his favorite teachers, and the counseling that the students received upon hearing the news of Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination.

Childhood--Arkansas.

Segregation--Arkansas.

Education, Secondary--Arkansas.

African American churches--Arkansas.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968--Assassination.

Video Oral History Interview with Sgt. Maj. Alford McMichael, Section A2013_122_001_004,
TRT: 4:29:00 ?

As a student in high school, Alford McMichael worked several jobs to earn money. McMichael talks about buying a 1964 Chevy Impala in 1969, and describes how he paid his car loan and insurance. He also describes how he saved seventy-five cents of each dollar that he earned in order to support his expenses. While in school, McMichael did not receive college counseling, but he wanted to earn a college degree. Influenced by his older brother's service in the U.S. Marine Corps, McMichael enlisted in the Marines after graduating from high school in 1970. He describes basic training at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) in San Diego, California.

High school students--Employment.

United States. Marine Corps.

Automobiles--Purchasing.

San Diego (Calif.)

Video Oral History Interview with Sgt. Maj. Alford McMichael, Section A2013_122_001_005,
TRT: 5:28:10 ?

In 1971, after completing Infantry Training School and Basic Infantry Training at Camp Pendleton, California, Alford McMichael was assigned to the Marine Barracks in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. He describes his experience there, where he briefly served with his older brother. In 1973, McMichael was transferred to 2nd Battalion 5th Marines at Camp Pendleton. He then returned to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego to serve as a drill instructor and battalion drill master. McMichael describes his philosophy and experience as a drill instructor, reflecting upon his preference to teach than to punish. He was transferred to 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, at Camp Pendleton, and later, to the 3rd Marine Division, where he served as a shore party chief with the 3rd Division Support Group. McMichael also discusses his accelerated rise through the ranks in the U.S. Marines, and being promoted to a staff non-commissioned officer (NCO).

Military education--United States.

United States. Marine Corps.

Pearl Harbor (Hawaii).

Camp Pendleton (Calif.)

San Diego (Calif.)

Video Oral History Interview with Sgt. Maj. Alford McMichael, Section A2013_122_001_006,
TRT: 6:28:29 ?

In 1978, Alford McMichael transferred to the 3rd Marine Division, where he served as a shore party chief with the 3rd Division Support Group. He talks about becoming a staff non-commissioned officer, his assignment in Okinawa, Japan, his next promotion to become a gunnery sergeant in the U.S. Marines, and the responsibilities of the position. In 1979, he received orders to attend the Marine Security Guard School and was assigned to the U.S. embassy in Copenhagen, Denmark. McMichael describes his desire to work in a U.S. embassy, his experience there, and his service during the Iran hostage crisis. In 1981, he returned to Quantico, Virginia, to serve as an instructor for the Marine Security Guard School. In 1983, he was assigned to the University of Minnesota, as the Assistant Marine Officer Instructor for the U.S. Naval Reserve Officers'

Training Corps (NROTC) Program. McMichael discusses the success of his students, his promotion to first sergeant of the U.S. Marine Corps, and his assignment to Okinawa.

Okinawa Island (Japan)

United States. Embassy (Denmark)

Marine Corps Base Quantico (Va.)

United States. Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps.

Video Oral History Interview with Sgt. Maj. Alford McMichael, Section A2013_122_001_007, TRT: 7:32:00 ?

In 1984, Alford McMichael was assigned to Okinawa, Japan to serve as the First Sergeant of Company C, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion. McMichael describes his next assignment at Roosevelt Roads Naval Station in Puerto Rico, and his advice to young Marines wanting to get married. He discusses his and his brother's promotion to sergeant major, his appointment as the director of the Staff Noncommissioned Officers Academy and as Sergeant Major of Officer Candidate School, and the Gulf War. In 1994, McMichael returned to Okinawa, where he served as the Sergeant Major of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, before being appointed as the Sergeant Major for Manpower and Reserve Affairs at the U.S. Marine Corps headquarters. In 1999, McMichael became the 14th Sergeant Major of the U.S. Marine Corps, the first African American in this position. He discusses the responsibilities of his role, and becoming the first Sergeant Major to serve as the Supreme Allied Command of Europe.

Okinawa Island (Japan)

Vieques Island (P.R.)

Persian Gulf War, 1991.

United States. Marine Corps.

Allied Forces.--Supreme Headquarters.