

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Guion Bluford

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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>	Bluford, Guion Stewart, 1942-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Guion Bluford,
<b>Dates:</b>	May 9, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:56:46).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Astronaut and military officer Guion Bluford (1942 - ) , flew 144 combat missions in Southeast Asia as an F4C fighter pilot and served as a Branch Chief in the Air Force Flight Dynamics Laboratory. He became the first African American astronaut to fly in space on STS-8 (1983, shuttle Challenger), and the first African American to return to space a 2nd, 3rd, and 4th time on STS-61-A (1985, shuttle Challenger), STS-39 (1991, shuttle Discovery) and STS-53 (1992, shuttle Discovery). Bluford retired from NASA and the Air Force in 1993 to become a senior aerospace industry executive. Bluford was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 9, 2013, in Westlake, Ohio. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_165
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

NASA astronaut, aerospace engineer, military officer, and senior engineering executive, Guion S. Bluford Jr. was born on November 22, 1942 in Philadelphia,

Pennsylvania. He was the eldest of three sons of Guion Bluford, Sr., a mechanical engineer, and Lolita Bluford, a special education teacher. Bluford graduated from Overbrook Senior High School in 1960 and went on to graduate from Pennsylvania State University in 1964 with his B.S. degree in aerospace engineering. He was also a distinguished graduate of the U.S. Air Force ROTC program and received his commission as an Air Force second lieutenant. Bluford graduated from the Air Force Institute of Technology with his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in aerospace engineering in 1974 and 1978, respectively. In 1987, Bluford received his M.B.A. degree in management from the University of Houston at Clear Lake.

After receiving his Air Force pilot wings, Bluford was assigned to the 557th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. As an F4C fighter pilot, he flew 144 combat missions in Southeast Asia. From 1967 to 1972, he was a T-38 instructor pilot at Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas where he trained future U.S. Air Force and West German fighter pilots. Upon graduating from the Air Force Institute of Technology in 1974, Bluford was assigned to the U.S. Air Force Flight Dynamics Laboratory as Deputy for Advanced Concepts in the Aeromechanics Division and then as Branch Chief of the Aerodynamics and Airframe Branch. In 1978, Bluford was selected for the astronaut program and was officially designated a NASA astronaut one year later. In 1983, he became the first African American to fly in space and the first to receive the U.S. Air Force Command Pilot Astronaut Wings. Bluford was also the first African American to return to space a second, third, and fourth time when he flew on STS-61A in 1985, STS-39 in 1991, and STS-53 in 1992. He has logged more than 688 hours in space.

In 1993, he retired from NASA and the United States Air Force to become the Vice President/General Manager of the Engineering Services Division of NYMA Inc. He led the research support effort in aeropropulsion, satellite systems, microgravity and advanced materials. In 1997, he became the Vice President of the Aerospace Sector of the Federal Data Corporation and led the company's NASA business. Finally, in 2000, Bluford became the Vice President of Microgravity R&D and Operation for Northrop Grumman Corporation and led the industry team in the development of two experiment facilities currently on the International Space Station. Today, Bluford is the President of the Aerospace Technology Group in Cleveland, Ohio.

Bluford has been awarded the Department of Defense Superior Service and Meritorious Service Medals; the Air Force Legion of Merit and Meritorious Service Medal; the NASA Distinguished Service and Exceptional Service Medals; the Pennsylvania Distinguished Service Medal; the 1991 Black Engineer of the Year Award and fourteen honorary doctorate degrees. He was inducted into the

International Space Hall of Fame in 1997 and the U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame in 2010

Guion Stewart Bluford, Jr. was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 9, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Guion Bluford was conducted by Larry Crowe on May 9, 2013, in Westlake, Ohio, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Astronaut and military officer Guion Bluford (1942 - ) , flew 144 combat missions in Southeast Asia as an F4C fighter pilot and served as a Branch Chief in the Air Force Flight Dynamics Laboratory. He became the first African American astronaut to fly in space on STS-8 (1983, shuttle Challenger), and the first African American to return to space a 2nd, 3rd, and 4th time on STS-61-A (1985, shuttle Challenger), STS-39 (1991, shuttle Discovery) and STS-53 (1992, shuttle Discovery). Bluford retired from NASA and the Air Force in 1993 to become a senior aerospace industry executive.

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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:

Bluford, Guion Stewart, 1942-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Bluford, Guion Stewart, 1942---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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## Occupations:

Astronaut

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Military Officer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers|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 Guion Bluford, May 9, 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 Guion Bluford, Section  
A2013\_165\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:34 2013/05/09

Guion Bluford describes his family background. His mother, Harriet Lolita Brice Bluford, was born in

Indianapolis in 1914. She attended Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedalia, North Carolina, and Knoxville College in Tennessee, where she majored in biology. She went on to earn her master's degree from Columbia University's Teachers College, and worked as an instructor at Alcorn A&M University, where she met Bluford's father. Bluford's father, Guion Bluford, Sr., was born in 1914 in North Carolina. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in mechanical engineering from the University of Kansas and the University of Michigan, and worked as an instructor at Alcorn A&M University. Bluford, Sr. began his first engineering job in 1941 in Maine, and later at Frankfurt Arsenal in Philadelphia in 1942. Bluford describes his parents' early life in Philadelphia. He also talks about growing up in Philadelphia where his world was largely unaffected by segregation.

African American families--Philadelphia (Pa.).

African American parents--Education.

Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College--Faculty.

Childhood--Philadelphia (Pa.)--1940-1960.

Video Oral History Interview with Guion Bluford, Section  
A2013\_165\_001\_002, TRT: 2:30:16 2013/05/09

Guion Bluford was born and raised in West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania as the oldest of three sons. He describes his memories of growing up in Philadelphia, and his experience in school there. Bluford also describes his parents' personalities, and talks about his two younger brothers, Eugene and Kenneth. As a young boy, Bluford was active in the Boy Scouts with a keen interest in airplanes. He describes going to the YMCA in Philadelphia, where he built model airplanes. Bluford recalls that his role models as a child were the founders of major multinational aerospace and defense corporations such as Northrop-Grumman and Lockheed Martin. He also talks about his father's influence on him as an engineer. Bluford became interested in pursuing a career as an aeronautical engineer as early as high school.

African American families--Philadelphia (Pa.).

Childhood and youth--Philadelphia (Pa.)--1940-1960.

Brothers--Family relationships.

Aerospace engineering--Vocational guidance.

Video Oral History Interview with Guion Bluford, Section  
A2013\_165\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:07 2013/05/09

Guion Bluford attended Overbrook High School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he became interested in pursuing a career in aeronautical engineering. He talks about the teachers who influenced him in school as well as the poor counseling he received. After graduating from Overbrook High School, Bluford attended Penn State University, where he earned his B.S. degree in aerospace engineering in 1964. He describes his academic and social experience at Penn State in the 1960s. While at Penn State, Bluford also enrolled in the Air Force ROTC program and took the Advanced ROTC Course. He shares his father's struggle with epilepsy, his mother's ensuing responsibilities, his grandfather's role in his life, and his family's faith in the Christian Science Church.

African American high school students--Philadelphia (Pa.).

African Americans--College counseling.

Pennsylvania State University--Students, Black.

United States.--Air Force ROTC.

Epilepsy.

Video Oral History Interview with Guion Bluford, Section  
A2013\_165\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:48 2013/05/09

Guion Bluford joined Pennsylvania State University's Air Force ROTC Program. He describes his decision to enroll in the Advanced ROTC Course, and the wonderful experience he had at the ROTC summer camp where he decided to join the U.S. Air Force. He believed that his training as an Air Force pilot would help him prepare for a career as an aeronautical engineer. Bluford also talks about meeting his wife, Linda Tull, at Pennsylvania State University, their courtship, and their marriage in 1964. He recalls his mentors, his senior year as well as his graduation. In 1965, Bluford began his pilot training at Williams Air Force Base, and describes his experience there. While there, Bluford met Daniel "Chappie" James,

who was the first African American fighter pilot in the U.S. Air Force. Bluford explains his decision to also become a fighter pilot the year following his training. United States.--Air Force ROTC.

Aerospace engineering--Vocational guidance.

Pennsylvania State University--Students, Black--Courtship.

Aeronautics, Military--Study and teaching--United States. African American fighter pilots.

Video Oral History Interview with Guion Bluford, Section A2013\_165\_001\_005, TRT: 5:29:49 2013/05/09

After graduating from pilot training at Williams Air Force Base, Guion Bluford was assigned to serve as an F-4C Phantom fighter pilot in Vietnam, from 1966 to 1967. In this interview, he describes the details of his service. He also shares his perspectives on the Vietnam War, and talks about the loss of American lives, including those of his friends. Bluford also describes his plane being shot while he was in Vietnam. In 1967, Bluford was assigned to the 3630th Flying Training Wing at Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas, as a T-38A instructor pilot, where he served for five years. In 1972, Bluford entered the Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT) residency school at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio to pursue his master's degree in aerospace engineering.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975--Participation, African American.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975--Air operations--American.

James, Daniel, 1920-1978

Aeronautics, Military--Study and teaching--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Guion Bluford, Section A2013\_165\_001\_006, TRT: 6:30:12 2013/05/09

In 1971, Guion Bluford began studying for his master's degree in aerospace engineering at the Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT) while he was stationed at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. He went on to pursue his Ph.D. degree in aerospace engineering, where he focused on determining a numerical solution to describing the flow around a delta wing at hypersonic speeds. Bluford talks



about his experience at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, and explains the possible applications of his research. In 1977, Bluford applied to the NASA astronaut program and was accepted into the program in 1978. He describes the selection process. Bluford was one of thirty-five astronauts selected. Bluford also talks about Air Force pilot Robert Lawrence, who died in an F-104 Starfighter crash in 1967, and is recognized as the first African American astronaut.

Air Force Institute of Technology (U.S.)--Students.

Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (Ohio).

Aeronautics, Military--Study and teaching (Graduate)--United States.

Hypersonic planes--Research--United States.

African American astronauts.