

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Col. Christine Knighton

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Knighton, Christine B., 1957-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Col. Christine Knighton,
Dates:	July 26, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	9 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:08:53).
Abstract:	Colonel Col. Christine Knighton (1957 -), the second African American woman in the U.S. Department of Defense and the first woman from the State of Georgia to complete aviation training, became the first woman in the U.S. Army to command a tactical combat arms battalion on November 3, 1996. Knighton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 26, 2013, in Springfield, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_187
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

U.S. Army Colonel Christine B. Knighton was born in Cuthbert, Georgia in 1957. After graduating from Randolph County Comprehensive High School in 1975, she attended Tuskegee Institute and graduated with military honors in 1979. Knighton's military education includes the Aviation Officer Advanced Course, the UH-60 Blackhawk Helicopter Qualification Course, the Combined Arms Staff and Services School, and the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Knighton also received her M.A. degree in national security and strategy from the National War College at National Defense University.

Upon graduation from college, Knighton was commissioned a second lieutenant and served briefly in the Quartermaster Corps and the Transportation Officer's Corps. In 1980, she became the second African American woman in the U.S. Department of Defense and the first woman from the State of Georgia to complete aviation training. Knighton then reported to the U.S. Army V Corps in West Germany where her assignments included that of flight section leader of the 205th Transportation Battalion; platoon leader of the 62nd Aviation Company; and logistics officer of the 11th Aviation Battalion. In 1988, she assumed command of Delta Company, the 227th Aviation Regiment – 1st Cavalry's Combat Aviation Company, and then served a tour of duty at Camp Stanley in Uijeongbu, South Korea with the 2nd Infantry Division as the Aviation Brigade logistics officer.

Knighton reported to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas in 1990 and was assigned as an aviation logistician for the Combat Structure for the Army Study Group. She then was deployed to Operation Desert Storm with the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) to assess aviation units positioned in Saudi, Kuwait and Iraq. In 1993, Knighton was appointed as commander of Hotel Company in the 159th Aviation Regiment (AVIM) and deployed to Mogadishu, Somalia in support of the United Nations "Operation Continue Hope." Knighton became the first woman in the U.S. Army to command a tactical combat arms battalion on November 3, 1996 when she was assigned as commander of a Blackhawk Helicopter Battalion in the 1st Cavalry Division and deployed to Tulza, Bosnia-

Herzegovina to conduct aviation operations.

Knighton is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., the Tuskegee Airmen Association, and served as vice president of the Bessie Coleman Foundation. Knighton was nationally recognized by *Glamour Magazine* in 1989 as one of its “Top 10 Outstanding Working Women in the United States” and appeared on the cover of *USA Today*. In 1999, Knighton’s Blackhawk Helicopter Battalion was named U.S. Army Aviation Unit of the Year. Her military decorations include the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Achievement Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, the Southwest Asia Service Medal, the NATO Medal, the Kuwait Liberation Medal, and the Army’s Senior Aviator Badge. Knighton is also authorized to wear the Office of the Secretary of Defense Staff Badge, and received the Order of Saint Michael which recognized outstanding contributions to U.S. Army Aviation.

U.S. Army Colonel Christine B. Knighton was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* in July 26, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Col. Christine Knighton was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 26, 2013, in Springfield, Virginia, and was recorded on 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Colonel Col. Christine Knighton (1957 -), the second African American woman in the U.S. Department of Defense and the first woman from the State of Georgia to complete aviation training, became the first woman in the U.S. Army to command a tactical combat arms battalion on November 3, 1996.

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:

Knighton, Christine B., 1957-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Knighton, Christine B., 1957- --Interviews

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

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. Army

Occupations:

Colonel

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 Col. Christine Knighton, July 26, 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 Col. Christine Knighton, Section A2013_187_001_001, TRT: 1:28:42 ?

Christine Knighton describes her family's history. Her mother, Annie Lee Knighton, was born in February, 1940 in Cuthbert, Georgia. Her maternal grandparents, Sidney Knight and Mamie Ward Knight, were sharecroppers in Benevolence, Georgia and later bought a small farm of their own. Knighton's father, Clarence Brown, Sr., was born in Lumpkin, Georgia in April, 1938. Her paternal grandparents, Charlie Brown and Blanchie Jones Brown, owned a large piece of farmland, and her grandfather was also a carpenter. Knighton's parents met and dated in high school, and her mother gave birth to her as a teenager. She talks about her parents remaining unmarried, but staying friends. Although her father migrated north to Philadelphia and New Jersey to work in the automobile industry, Knighton spent many of her summers with him. She also describes her parents' personalities, and talks about her father's ownership of a towing company in Vauxhall, New Jersey.

African American families.

African American mothers--Georgia.

African American fathers--Georgia.

Landowners--Georgia.

Single parent families.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Christine Knighton, Section A2013_187_001_002, TRT: 2:28:44 ?

Christine Knighton and her two sisters, Winifred and Pamela, were raised by their mother in Benevolence, Georgia, where they spent their early childhood on their maternal grandparents' farm. Although her father and his family lived in New Jersey during these years, Knighton was able to spend time with him and became close to her half-brothers. She describes her father's personality, and talks about her siblings as well as her happy childhood in Benevolence. She describes growing up on her grandparents' farm. She also recalls President John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963, a few days before her birthday. In 1963, Knighton also began attending school at Lumpkin Elementary and High School in Stewart County, Georgia.

Single parent families.

Childhood--Georgia.

African American grandparents--Georgia.

African American fathers.

Farm life--Georgia.

Education, Primary--Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Christine Knighton, Section A2013_187_001_003, TRT: 3:27:57 ?

In 1963, Christine Knighton began school at Lumpkin Elementary School and High School in Lumpkin, Georgia. She recalls enjoying school, riding the bus to and from school, and talks about the ongoing Civil Rights Movement in Albany, Georgia. In the fifth grade, Knighton moved to the Cuthbert, Georgia public school system, and began attending Henderson Elementary and High School. She talks about her interest in history in middle school, and in home economics in high school. She recalls the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King in 1968, and being told of the news at school. Although the Knightons were avid basketball players, she did not play any sports. Knighton excelled at school, and enrolled at Tuskegee Institute. She also talks about her family's first television set purchase in 1965, her visits to her father's home in Philadelphia, and her first visit to Tuskegee Institute with her family.

Education--Georgia.

Civil rights movements--Georgia.

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

Tuskegee Institute.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Christine Knighton, Section A2013_187_001_004, TRT: 4:28:45 ?

Christine Knighton attended Randolph County Comprehensive High School in Cutberth, Georgia, following the integration of schools there in the late 1960s. She then enrolled at Tuskegee Institute, where she majored in home economics and joined the Army ROTC program. Knighton describes her experience at Tuskegee as well as her mentors. She also explains singer and songwriter Lionel Ritchie's relationship with the university. In her sophomore year, Knighton accepted a three-year ROTC scholarship in order to continue her college education. She describes her experience as an ROTC cadet, and her interest in flight school. After graduating from Tuskegee Institute in 1979, Knighton attended Quartermaster School and was assigned to the Army Quartermaster Corps. Following flight training at Fort Rucker, Alabama, she was transferred to the Transportation Corps. Knighton also talks about flying helicopters, and attending Ground School Training with the father of black aviation, Chief Alfred C. Anderson.

Education, Secondary--Georgia.

Tuskegee Institute.

United States. Army. Reserve Officers' Training Corps.

United States. Air Force.

Air pilots, Military--Training of--United States.

Fort Rucker (Ala.)

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Christine Knighton, Section A2013_187_001_005, TRT: 5:30:20 ?

Christine Knighton graduated from flight training school at Fort Rucker, Alabama in 1980, becoming the second African American woman in the U.S., after Marcella Hayes Ng, and the first woman from Georgia to do so. She talks about her experience there, and flying Bell Huey helicopters. Knighton was then assigned to the Fifth Corps at Fliegerhorst Kaserne, Germany, before being reassigned to the 11th Aviation Battalion. She talks about being promoted to first lieutenant, captain and major, and serving as Battalion S4 in the 11th Aviation Battalion. After returning to the U.S. in 1985, Knighton was assigned

to the 1st Cavalry Division's Aviation Intermediate Maintenance Company (AVIM) as Armament and Technical Supply Platoon Leader, Production Control Officer and Company Executive Officer. In 1988, she served a tour in Korea as the 2nd Infantry Division's Aviation Brigade Logistics Officer. Knighton also recalls attending the Tuskegee Airmen Convention in Atlanta in 1980.

Air pilots, Military--Training of--United States.

United States. Army. European Command.

United States. Army. Aviation.

Korea (South)

United States. Air Force--Officers.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Christine Knighton, Section A2013_187_001_006, TRT: 6:28:37 ?

In 1990, Christine Knighton was deployed to the Gulf War with the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL). She talks about her experience in the Middle East, challenges posed by the desert environment, women serving in the Gulf War, living conditions on the bases, the Iraqis use of Scud missiles, and their eventual surrender in February, 1991. Knighton then returned to Fort Leavenworth to join the Aviation Study Group. She was promoted to become a major in 1991, and attended the Command and General Staff College (CGSC). In 1992, Knighton was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell and assumed command of Hotel Company, 159th Aviation Regiment. As Major Company Commander, she served in Operation Restore Hope in Somalia in 1993 and 1994. Knighton also reflects upon her tour in Korea in 1998, women being able to join combat missions, and the repeal of the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy by the U.S. Army.

Persian Gulf War, 1991.

Fort Leavenworth (Kan.)

U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

Korea (South)

Operation Restore Hope, 1992-

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Christine Knighton, Section A2013_187_001_007, TRT: 7:29:19 ?

Christine Knighton married her colleague, Bennie Williams, Jr., in 1992, and the couple has one son, Tre Williams. Starting in 1992, Knighton served two years at Army Personnel Command as the assignments officer for Aviation majors and lieutenant colonels. In 1996, she became the first woman in the U.S. Army to command a tactical combat arms battalion. She led the 2d Battalion, 227th Aviation, which was later selected as the Army's Aviation Unit of the Year. Knighton talks about attending the Army War College, becoming a full colonel, and her assignment as Assistant Director of Officer and Enlisted Personnel Management in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. She describes her experience at the Pentagon, and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Knighton also talks about the Army Married Couples Assignment Program, and her appointment as the Director of Training Development for the Soldier Support Institute at Fort Jackson.

Marriage.

Command of troops.

United States. Army Air Forces.

Army War College (U.S.)

Pentagon (Va.)

September 11 Terrorist Attacks, 2001.

Fort Jackson (S.C.).

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Christine Knighton, Section A2013_187_001_008, TRT: 8:28:23 ?

Christine Knighton's last assignment in the U.S. Army was as Chief Learning Officer for the Army Officer Corps. In 2008, Knighton retired from the Army, after thirty years of service. She then attended Superintendents Training Program at Broad Superintendents Academy, and served as the Chief of Human Resources for Prince George's County Public Schools for eighteen months. Knighton describes her experience there. She also attended Georgetown University's Leadership Coaching Program, and served as a leadership and executive coach, starting her own firm, 'Winners'. In this section of the interview, Knighton reflects upon her life, career and legacy. She describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community. She also reflects upon the large percentage of African American women enlisting in the Army, and her choice to balance a family alongside her career.

United States. Army--Officers.

Public schools--Maryland--Prince George's County.

Georgetown University.

Leadership.

Mentoring.

Reminiscing.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Christine Knighton, Section A2013_187_001_009, TRT: 9:18:06 ?

In this closing section of the interview, Christine Knighton reflects upon the future and the legacy of African American women in the military, particularly in aviation. She also shares how she would like to be remembered. Knighton closes the interview by describing her photographs.

United States. Army--Women.

Reminiscing.

Photographs.