

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with David Brown

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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>	Brown, David, 1920-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with David Brown,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 20, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	10 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:22:15).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Soldier David Brown (1920 - 2015 ) served in the United States Army during World War II, and participated in the Normandy landings on D-Day. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 20, 2013, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_193
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Enlisted Soldier David W. Brown was born on August 26, 1920 in Memphis, Tennessee. In 1943, four years after completing high school, and three days after he and his wife were married, Brown was drafted into the United States Army.

In 1944, Brown was deployed during World War II with the 490th Port Battalion, 226 Port Company European Theater, where he served as a technician 4th Grade. On D-Day, June 6, 1944, Brown landed on the shores of Utah Beach alongside 23,000 other men as allied forces stormed the beaches at Normandy. The following year, while still serving in Europe, he would travel to England, France and Belgium. In December of 1945, Brown received an Honorable Discharge from the United States Army. Following the end of the War, he returned to the United States and was discharged from the military in a ceremony at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Brown then traveled to St. Louis, Missouri, where he attended Maplewood Refrigeration, a vocational school. After completing training there in 1948, Brown worked as a refrigeration engineer. He also attended the Carrier Corporation, another vocational institute in Syracuse, New York, where he received further schooling in AC engineering. Brown went on to work as a refrigeration and air conditioning engineer at Beaumont Medical and System Air. He then established his own firm, Brown Industrial Corporation.

Brown was the recipient of many awards and honors. In 2004, he was the featured veteran in Studs Terkel's production *The Good War*, showcased in Skokie, Illinois. Then, in 2009, after contributing to the History Channel's program *A Distant Shore: African Americans of D-Day*, Brown was awarded an Emmy plaque from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. In 2010, during a ceremony in Northbrook, Illinois, he was awarded the Chevalier of the Legion of Honor medal, the highest decoration bestowed on those who have achieved remarkable deeds for France.

Brown passed away on June 13, 2015 at age 94.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with David Brown was conducted by Denise Gines on August 20, 2013, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 10 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Soldier David Brown (1920 - 2015 ) served in the United States Army during World War II, and participated in the Normandy landings on D-Day.

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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:

Brown, David, 1920-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brown, David, 1920- --Interviews

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United States--Armed Forces--African Americans--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:**

Soldier

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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 David Brown, August 20, 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 6/7/2022 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 David Brown, Section A2013\_193\_001\_001, TRT: 1:26:12  
2013/08/20

David Brown talks about his family's background. Brown's mother, Mamie Ella Brown, was born in the northern region of New York state and belonged to the Mohawk tribe. After her parents' death when she was six years old, she moved

to Texas to live with her older sister, who ran a rest area for Pullman porters on the railroad. Brown's father, David Budlam (ph.) Brown, was born in the Eastern Caribbean Islands, and graduated from high school in Grenada. Brown's parents met in Texarkana, Texas, and then moved and settled down in Memphis, Tennessee, where they raised six children. His father worked in the dairy industry there, while his mother was a housewife. Brown recalls his mother's electrical and plumbing skills as well as Christmas holidays during the Great Depression. He also describes his memories of growing up in Memphis, the segregated neighborhood where his family lived, his experience in school, and his interest in airplanes.

African American families.

African American mothers--New York (State)

African American fathers--Caribbean area.

Racially mixed people--United States.

Native Americans.

Childhood--Tennessee--Memphis.

Depressions--1929--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with David Brown, Section A2013\_193\_001\_002, TRT: 2:30:04  
2013/08/20

As a child and a teenager, David Brown became interested in engineering and talks about his desire to become an engineer as early as elementary school, building radios and a doorbell as a teenager. He also talks about his interest in airplanes. Brown attended church as a child. He recalls growing up during the Great Depression, losing the money he had saved, listening to the BBC radio's newscast on World War II, and his friends who volunteered for military service. After graduating from high school in 1939, Brown began working in an engineering store's electrical distribution department, until he was drafted into the war. He also talks about meeting his wife and getting married two days before being drafted.

Education--Tennessee.

Aeronautics.

Depressions--1929--United States.

World War, 1939-1945.

Marriage.

Video Oral History Interview with David Brown, Section A2013\_193\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:32  
2013/08/20

David Brown dated and married his wife, Willie Mae Childress in 1943 after eleven months of courtship. Two days after his wedding day, Brown and his brother, Grover, were drafted into World War II. He recalls his mother's reaction to her oldest sons being drafted at the same time, and describes their trip to Fort Benning, Georgia in January of 1943. Brown and his brother were split up at Fort Benning, and Brown was assigned to boot camp at Camp Harahan, Louisiana. He describes his experience at boot camp, and his altercation with the first sergeant there. Brown was then assigned to Charleston, South Carolina, and then to Newport News, Virginia by August of 1943. He discusses growing up during segregation in Memphis, Tennessee, and his observations of the segregated U.S. Army during World War II. He also talks about saving up to buy a 1934 Oldsmobile while he was in high school.

Marriage.

World War, 1939-1945.

Fort Benning (Ga.)  
Segregation--Tennessee--Memphis.  
United States. Army--African Americans.

Video Oral History Interview with David Brown, Section A2013\_193\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:43  
2013/08/20

After completing his training at Camp Harahan, Louisiana, David Brown and his company in the 490th Port Battalion were moved to Newport News, Virginia in August of 1943. Shortly afterwards, they were deployed overseas to Liverpool, England. Brown describes his voyage aboard the SS Argentina, and his surprise at being deployed overseas. Upon arriving in Liverpool, he was promoted to the rank of Technician Fifth Grade, and served as a winch operator. He recalls his reception as an American soldier in Liverpool, where he was not subjected to racial discrimination. He also talks about the white American soldiers' discomfort with the integrated environment, meeting the first sergeant whom he had the altercation with at Camp Harahan, and reuniting with his brother, Grover. In February of 1944, Brown was reassigned to Cardiff, South Wales, where he awaited further orders. He describes the comfort he felt in being married and receiving letters from home.

Basic training (Military education)  
World War, 1939-1945--African American soldiers.  
World War, 1939-1945--Campaigns--Western Front.  
Liverpool (England)  
Cardiff (Wales)

Video Oral History Interview with David Brown, Section A2013\_193\_001\_005, TRT: 5:28:17  
2013/08/20

David Brown was assigned to the 490th Port Battalion during World War II, and was a part of the troops that were involved in the invasion of Normandy, France, on D-Day, June 6, 1944. In this section of the interview, Brown shares the details of the events that led up to D-Day. In May of 1944, while awaiting his orders in Cardiff, South Wales, Brown was assigned to a mission that supported the interception of German spies in days leading up to D-Day. He then received orders to prepare for his assignment to Utah Beach, Normandy, by May 28, 1944. Brown describes his experience of travelling to Normandy and landing on Utah Beach on June 6, 1944. He also recalls and reflects upon the deaths of young American soldiers during the invasion.

World War, 1939-1945.  
World War, 1939-1945--Campaigns--France--Normandy.  
Cardiff (Wales)  
Espionage, German--United States.  
Operation Overlord.

Video Oral History Interview with David Brown, Section A2013\_193\_001\_006, TRT: 6:28:46  
2013/08/20

David Brown was part of the 490th Port Battalion during World War II, and was involved in the invasion of Normandy, France at Utah Beach in June, 1944. He describes his experience while stationed at Utah Beach from June to November of 1944, the roles of the soldiers there in supporting the front line, and the rare instances of racial discrimination. On Thanksgiving Day, 1944, Brown's company was reassigned to Rouen, France, where they continued to support the front lines of the war that had then moved to the border of Belgium and

Germany. With the launch of the German offense, the Battle of the Bulge, in December of 1944, the American troops began to suffer greater losses. Brown talks about the Germans killing American soldiers, stealing their uniforms, and infiltrating the American troops. He also describes his experience in Rouen as the war intensified.

World War, 1939-1945--Campaigns--France--Normandy.

World War, 1939-1945--African American soldiers.

World War, 1939-1945--Campaigns--Western Front.

Ardennes, Battle of the, 1944-1945.

Rouen (France)

Video Oral History Interview with David Brown, Section A2013\_193\_001\_007, TRT: 7:28:08  
2013/08/20

David Brown served in World War II in the 490th Port Battalion, and was involved in the invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944. He talks about his close-knit unit, being promoted to Technician Fourth Grade, other black soldiers who served in his unit, and his experience at Rouen, France, where his unit had to kill German intruders on one occasion. He also recalls the young soldiers who lost their lives on D-Day, and remain buried on Utah Beach in Normandy. After the war ended in May, 1945, Brown was assigned to special duty in Rouen, where he witnessed an American soldier killing an anti-Semitic German soldier. He was then stationed in Cherbourg, France, and assigned as a technician to capture a German ship there. Brown's company began to transition out of Europe and back to the U.S. following their time in Cherbourg, and he describes this transition and his voyage back to New York in December of 1945.

World War, 1939-1945--Campaigns--France--Normandy.

Rouen (France)

War--Moral and ethical aspects.

Cherbourg (France)

World War, 1939-1945--Armistices.

Video Oral History Interview with David Brown, Section A2013\_193\_001\_008, TRT: 8:28:05  
2013/08/20

In December of 1945, David Brown returned to the U.S. from World War II. He was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army and then returned to his hometown of Memphis, Tennessee in January of 1946. Brown describes his journey home, and his family's warm reception. After experiencing an integrated environment overseas, Brown was struck by his continued encounter with racial discrimination in the U.S., which also extended to African American war veterans. He also describes his decision to attend trade school for veterans to study refrigeration and air-conditioning in St. Louis, Missouri, graduating with excellent grades, and being recruited for employment where he was subjected to discrimination. Brown talks about his brother Grover's return from the war and his career in the railroad and in printing. He also talks about his children, Sharon and David, Jr. As early as the 1940s, Brown made efforts to unionize African American labor and attain equal labor rights.

World War, 1939-1945--Veterans.

Segregation--Tennessee--Memphis.

Race relations--Tennessee--Memphis.

Brothers--Family relationships.

African American families.

Labor unions.

Video Oral History Interview with David Brown, Section A2013\_193\_001\_009, TRT: 9:15:27  
2013/08/20

In this closing section of the interview, David Brown reflects upon his legacy, how he would like to be remembered, being recognized as an African American soldier in World War II and D-Day in Normandy, France, and receiving the Legion of Honor Award in 2010. He discusses the movie industry's erroneous portrayal of aspects of the war, reflects upon the politics behind the Vietnam War, and talks about the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Presidents John F. Kennedy and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Brown also explains his willingness to talk about segregation in the U.S. Army during his service in World War II, and the difference between the reception that he receives as a World War II veteran in Europe and in America. He also criticizes the lack or prioritization of veterans' services in America and racial prejudices that continue to exist.

Reminiscing.

World War, 1939-1945--Campaigns--France--Normandy.

Veterans--Services for--United States.

World War, 1939-1945--African American soldiers.

Race relations--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with David Brown, Section A2013\_193\_001\_010, TRT: 10:18:01  
2013/08/20

David Brown describes his photographs.

Photographs.