

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Tzomes, C.A., 1944-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes,
Dates:	August 21, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	9 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:55:17).
Abstract:	Captain and U.S. navy (retired) Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes (1944 - 2019) became the first African American to command a U.S. submarine in 1983 when he was assigned as the Commanding Officer of USS HOUSTON (SSN 713). Tzomes was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 21, 2013, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_233
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Navy Captain (Retired) C. A. "Pete" Tzomes was born on December 30, 1944 in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. He was the oldest of two children parented by James C. Tzomes and Charlotte Eudora (Hill) Tzomes, who instilled in him the value of hard work and discipline at an early age. Tzomes decided to pursue a career in the U.S. Navy during junior high school following a recruiting visit by a Naval Academy midshipman. Later, in 1963, Tzomes was admitted to the U.S. Naval Academy after briefly attending the State University of New York at Oneonta. He graduated in 1967 and was commissioned as an Ensign.

Upon graduation, Tzomes completed submarine nuclear power training which was followed by submarine training. He was then assigned to the ballistic missile submarine USS *WILL ROGERS* in 1969 and served in various division officer billets before being transferred to the fast attack submarine USS *PINTADO*. After completing Engineer Officer qualification in 1973, Tzomes was assigned as engineer officer on board USS *DRUM*; and, from 1979 to 1982, served as Executive Officer on board USS *CAVALLA*. In 1983, Tzomes became the first African American to command a U.S. submarine when he was assigned as the Commanding Officer of USS *HOUSTON (SSN 713)*. At the conclusion of his command tour in 1986, he was assigned as the Force Operations Officer on the staff of Commander Submarine Forces U.S. Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii and oversaw the operations of all submarines in the Pacific theater. In 1988, Tzomes was appointed as the Director of the Equal Opportunity Division in the Bureau of Naval Personnel and as the advisor to the Chief of Naval Personnel on equal opportunity issues; and, in 1990, he became Commanding Officer of Recruit Training Command Great Lakes (boot camp). Tzomes then served as Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Inspector General before he retired from the Navy in 1994.

Tzomes was an active member of the National Naval Officers Association, including two years as a regional Vice President, while on active duty. This is a professional organization that targets professionalism and development of sea service minority officers (Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard). After Navy retirement, Tzomes worked as a

utility manager at Exelon Corporation until July 2012. He held various leadership positions while primarily assigned to the Quad Cities Generating Station located in western Illinois. He continued to keep abreast of Navy issues through his affiliation with the Naval Submarine League, the U.S. Naval Institute, the United States Submarine Veterans and the Navy League. His military honors and decorations include the Legion of Merit (with Two Gold Stars), the Meritorious Service Medal (with Three Gold Stars), and the Navy Commendation Medal (with Two Gold Stars) as well as various unit and campaign ribbons.

Tzomes married the former Carolyn Eason in July, 2007. Offspring from a previous marriage include a son, Chancellor A. Tzomes II, and a granddaughter, Mariana Tzomes.

Tzomes passed away on June 13, 2019.

Navy Captain (Retired) C.A. "Pete" Tzomes *The HistoryMakers* August 21, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes was conducted by Anthony Poole on August 21, 2013, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Captain and U.S. navy (retired) Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes (1944 - 2019) became the first African American to command a U.S. submarine in 1983 when he was assigned as the Commanding Officer of USS HOUSTON (SSN 713).

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:

Tzomes, C.A., 1944-

Poole, Anthony (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Tzomes, C.A., 1944- --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:

Captain, U.S. Navy (Retired)

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 Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes, August 21, 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 Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes, Section A2013_233_001_001, TRT: 1:30:31 ?

C.A. Tzomes describes his family's background. Tzomes' adoptive mother, Charlotte Eudora Hill, was born in Gordonsville, Virginia, in December, 1905. His father, James Chancellor Tzomes, was born in Pendleton, Virginia, in 1907. At an early age, Tzomes found out that he had been adopted by his parents, without knowing the details. Upon his father's death in 1998, he discovered that his adoptive father was also his biological father. Tzomes discusses his relationship with his adoptive mother and her influence on him, her personality, and her emphasis on education. He also talks about his father's role as the provider for the family, and his employment at a steel mill in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, as a bartender, and as a laborer at a store. Tzomes describes his childhood memories of growing up in Williamsport, explains its geographical location, talks about his adopted brother, Pierre, and reflects upon how his parents settled down in Williamsport.

African American families.

Adopted children--Interviews.

African American mothers--Virginia.

African American fathers--Virginia.

Childhood--Pennsylvania.

Video Oral History Interview with Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes, Section A2013_233_001_002, TRT: 2:26:44 ?

C.A. Tzomes was raised in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. He recalls his home and his neighborhood in Williamsport, which was one of three black neighborhoods in the city. He describes his observation of "the South revealing what the North concealed," and his experience of discrimination and racism during the 1940s and 1950s. Tzomes attended Transeau Elementary School, Stevens Junior High School and Williamsport High School, where his favorite subject was math. He also played baseball while growing up. Tzomes also describes the sights, sounds and smells of growing up in Williamsport, explains his childhood career ambitions, talks about his brother, Pierre, and recalls attending Ebenezer Baptist Church and their help with his admission fees to the U.S. Naval Academy.

Childhood--Pennsylvania.

Williamsport (Pa.)--Social life and customs.

Education--Pennsylvania.

African American churches--Pennsylvania.

Video Oral History Interview with Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes, Section A2013_233_001_003, TRT: 3:27:59 ?

C.A. Tzomes grew up in Williamsport, Pennsylvania in the 1940s and 1950s. He

attended Stevens Junior High School, where in the eighth grade, he became interested in attending the U.S. Naval Academy after hearing a Naval midshipman give a presentation. Tzomes discusses the racial climate in Williamsport, the desegregated public services, and his junior high school counselor trying to dissuade him from attending the Naval Academy because of his race. He graduated from high school in 1962, and describes his application process to the Naval Academy. Unable to gain admission at his first trial through his congressman, Tzomes began attending the State University of New York at Oneonta, and was admitted to the Academy in 1963. He also talks about his high school graduating class, community role models who emphasized education, the importance of getting good grades, his father's alcoholism, his first summer and plebe year at the Naval Academy, being biracial, and his observations of social perceptions of skin color.

Childhood--Pennsylvania.

Race relations--Pennsylvania.

United States Naval Academy.

State University of New York at Oneonta.

College choice--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes, Section A2013_233_001_004, TRT: 4:29:23 ?

In June 1963, C.A. Tzomes began his plebe summer at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. He describes his experience and reflects upon missing key sociopolitical events of the early 1960s. Tzomes and his classmate, Calvin Huey, were the only two African Americans in their class at the Academy, and Huey went on to become the first black player on the U.S. Navy's varsity football team. Tzomes describes the details of his Plebe Year at the academy, and talks about his mentor, Pat Prout. He also elaborates upon the racial challenges of being black in the U.S. Navy in the 1960s. Tzomes and his African American colleagues at the Naval Academy found comfort in the welcoming black community in Annapolis, particularly in the home of Ms. Lillie Mae Chase, who stepped in as their mother away from home. Tzomes graduated from Annapolis in 1967, with hopes of being a pilot in the U.S. Marine Corps. When disqualified due to his height, he applied and qualified for the U.S. Navy's Nuclear Power Program.

United States Naval Academy.

United States Naval Academy--African American students.

Mentoring.

Annapolis (Md.)

Nuclear energy--Military aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes, Section A2013_233_001_005, TRT: 5:30:02 ?

After graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1967, C.A. Tzomes joined the Nuclear Power Program. He completed twelve months of nuclear power training, followed by six months of submarine training at the Naval Submarine School. Tzomes describes his training, his interest in submarines, and his interview with Admiral Hyman G. Rickover, the father of the nuclear Navy, prior to starting the Nuclear Power Program. In 1969, Tzomes was assigned to the ballistic missile submarine USS Will Rogers; and in 1970, he was assigned to the pre-commissioning unit of the fast attack submarine USS Pintado; and then in 1973, he was assigned as Engineer Officer on USS Drum. He describes the racial challenges that he encountered as the first black admitted to the

Submarine Nuclear Power Program. He also recalls his experience with racism while in the U.S. Naval Academy, reflects upon the Vietnam War, and talks about his marriages and the birth of his son, Chancellor Alfonso, in 1969.

Nuclear energy--Military aspects.

United States. Navy.

Submarines (Ships).

United States. Navy. African Americans.

Race discrimination--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes, Section A2013_233_001_006, TRT: 6:31:21 ?

From 1973 to 1976, C.A. Tzomes was assigned as the engineer officer on the USS Drum, and describes his experience. From 1976 to 1979, he was assigned to the Nuclear Propulsion Examining Board in the staff of the commander-in-chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. In 1979, he was appointed as the executive officer on the USS Cavalla, where he served for approximately three years. Tzomes was selected as the commanding officer of the USS Houston in 1983, becoming the first African American to command a U.S. submarine. In this section of the interview, Tzomes also discusses how he dealt with racial insubordination while on assignments in the U.S. Navy, his relationship with white and black officers and crew members on the USS Will Rogers and the USS Pintado, submarine officer ranks, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt's efforts to address racial tensions in the U.S. Navy in the 1970s, and the results of these efforts. He also talks about his colleague and well-wisher, Willie Wells, on the USS Will Rogers.

Nuclear ships--United States.

United States. Navy.

Submarines (Ships).

Race relations--United States.

Nuclear propulsion.

Video Oral History Interview with Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes, Section A2013_233_001_007, TRT: 7:28:27 ?

In 1983, C.A. Tzomes became the first African American commanding officer of a U.S. Naval submarine. He describes his experience and reception as the CO of the USS Houston, reflects upon advancement of African Americans in the U.S. Navy, and talks about the Navy's Centennial Seven. In 1986, Tzomes was promoted to the rank of captain in the U.S. Navy, and was assigned as the Force Operations Officer on the staff of the Commander for Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii from 1986 until 1988. He then served for two years in Washington, D.C. as the director of Navy Equal Opportunity and personal advisor to the chief of Naval personnel on equal opportunity issues. Tzomes also talks about serving as a mentor in the National Naval Officers Association, his first marriage, and issues of equal opportunity and racial bias in the U.S. Navy.

Submarines (Ships).

Warships--United States.

Pearl Harbor (Hawaii).

United States. Navy--Officers.

Mentoring.

Race discrimination--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes, Section A2013_233_001_008, TRT: 8:22:34 ?

In 1990, C.A. Tzomes was appointed as commanding officer of the U.S. Navy's Recruit Training Command at Great Lakes Naval Station. He describes his experience, and talks about meeting his second wife, Carolyn Eason in Chicago. In this section of the interview, Tzomes discusses his retirement from the Navy in 1994, talks about the Navy's Centennial Seven, the fall in the number of black submarine commanding officers since 2009, and his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He also recalls his father's death in 1998 and finding out that his adoptive father was his biological father. Tzomes closes this section of the interview with reflections upon his life, career and legacy.

United States. Navy--Recruiting, enlistment, etc.

Marriage.

United States. Navy. African Americans.

African American fathers and sons.

Reminiscing.

Video Oral History Interview with Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes, Section A2013_233_001_009, TRT: 9:08:16 ?

C.A. Tzomes describes his photographs.

Photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Capt. C.A. "Pete" Tzomes, Section A2013_233_Tzomes_CA_06_MED_001, TRT: