

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with David Richards

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Richards, David, 1929-2019
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with David Richards,
Dates:	February 10, 2017
Bulk Dates:	2017
Physical Description:	5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:28:43).
Abstract:	Military officer David Richards, Jr. (1929 - 2019) conducted over 11,000 parachute operations on behalf of the U.S. Army, and was inducted into the Parachute Rigger Warrant Officer's Hall of Fame. Richards was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 10, 2017, in Savannah, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2017_044
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Military officer David Richards was born on March 19, 1929 in Sedalia, Missouri to Christina Diggs Richards and David Richards. He attended Lincoln School and C.C. Hubbard High School in Sedalia. Richards then studied at the College of Mortuary Science in St. Louis, Missouri, graduating in 1951. Years later, Richards received his B.A. degree in business administration from Park College in Parkville, Missouri in 1975. Three years later, he earned his M.A. degree in human resources from Pepperdine University.

Upon graduating from high school, Richards joined the United States Army in 1946. He was stationed at Camp Stoneman in California, and deployed overseas to the Pacific Theater. Richards became a member of the U.S. Army band, and rose to head of the reed section. After completing U.S. Army service in 1948, Richards worked briefly as an apprentice mortician, and returned to the Army in 1954. He completed airborne training at Fort Benning, Georgia and attended rigger school at Fort Lee, Virginia. He served ten years in the 612th Quartermaster Aerial Supply Company, and then transferred to the Artic Test Center in Fort Greely, Alaska, where he tested airdrop equipment. Then, Richards was sent to the U.S. Army Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center in Massachusetts, where he helped develop expendable parachutes for the Vietnam War. In 1968, Richards became the Army's first African American warrant officer, and remained the sole African American in that rank until his retirement in 1983. After his Army career, Richards worked at the Savannah-Chatham Metropolitan Police Department in staffing, and later as a crime prevention analyst. He continued teaching as an adjunct professor at Saint Leo University until 2000.

As the first African American warrant officer, Richards was inducted into the Parachute Rigger Warrant Officer's Hall of Fame upon his retirement in 1983. Richards was also inducted into the Distinguished Order of Saint Martin within the Quartermaster Corps in the United States Army. He was a three time recipient of the Omega Man of the Year Award and the Superior Service Award. Georgia Legislative Black Caucus, Inc. also honored Richards with the Salute to Veterans Award.

Richards was a member of St. Philip A.M.E. Church in Savannah, Georgia. He also served as an advisor to the director of the West Board Street YMCA, as president for the Mental Health Association of the Coastal Empire, as vice chair of human services for Chatham County and as chairperson of the superintendent advisory council for the Chatham County Board of Education. Richards was a board member for the Frank Callen Boys and Girls Club, JHS of Savannah, the Meditation Center Board, the Martin Luther King Day Observance Committee and the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum.

Richards and his wife, Swannie Moore Richards have three children: David Richards III, Yvette Richards, and Bonnye Richards Anthony.

Richards passed away on February 5, 2019.

David Richards was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 9, 2017.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with David Richards was conducted by Denise Gines on February 10, 2017, in Savannah, Georgia, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Military officer David Richards, Jr. (1929 - 2019) conducted over 11,000 parachute operations on behalf of the U.S. Army, and was inducted into the Parachute Rigger Warrant Officer's Hall of Fame.

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:

Richards, David, 1929-2019

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Richards, David, 1929-2019 --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Military Officer

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 David Richards, February 10, 2017. 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 David Richards, Section A2017_044_001_001, TRT: 1:29:11 ?

David Richards was born on March 19, 1929 in Sedalia, Missouri to Christina Diggs Richards and David Richards. His mother was one of eleven children born to Anna Diggs and William Diggs in Fayette, Missouri. Due to poor medical care, only three of her siblings lived to adulthood. Richards' mother graduated from George R. Smith College, and taught at Philander Smith College and the State Fair Community College for Adult Education in Sedalia. Richards' father was one of seven children born to Susie Richards and William Richards in Howard County, Missouri. He obtained a sixth grade education, and served in World War I. He later became a blacksmith assistant on the Missouri Pacific Railroad. Richards had one older sister, and was raised in a close knit neighborhood in Sedalia. In 1935, he began his education at Lincoln School. He joined the Boy Scouts, and delivered newspapers to earn extra money during the Great Depression.

Video Oral History Interview with David Richards, Section A2017_044_001_002, TRT: 2:29:56 ?

David Richards learned to play the clarinet at the Lincoln School in Sedalia, Missouri, and joined the band upon entering C.C. Hubbard High School. He also played football and sang in the school choir. After graduating in 1946, Richards joined the U.S. Army. He completed basic training at Camp Lee, Virginia, where he helped read and write mail for older, illiterate servicemen. He was briefly stationed at Camp Stoneman in California, and then deployed overseas to the Pacific Theater of World War II, which had recently ended. At this point, Richards describes the poverty and devastation caused by the war. While stationed in the Philippines, Richards auditioned for a U.S. Army band, and became the head of the reed section. He also organized a choral group that sang on the military radio, and a jazz band that performed at the officers' clubs. The ensemble was composed of African American servicemen, and performed exclusively for the white officers.

Video Oral History Interview with David Richards, Section A2017_044_001_003, TRT: 3:30:06 ?

David Richards completed his U.S. Army service in 1948. He worked as an apprentice mortician in Sedalia, Missouri, and used funding from the G.I. Bill to attend the College of Mortuary Science in St Louis, Missouri. In 1954, Richards decided to return to the U.S. Army. He completed airborne training at Fort Benning, Georgia, and attended rigger school at Fort Lee, Virginia. As an African American paratrooper trainee, Richards was subjected to harassment from instructors and superiors who sought to discourage him. Nonetheless, he served for ten years in the 612th Quartermaster Aerial Supply Company at Fort Bragg, where he conducted field testing on parachutes and airdrop equipment. Next, Richards transferred to the Arctic Test Center in Fort Greenly, Alaska, where he tested airdrop equipment in frigid temperatures. Richards then transferred to the U.S. Army Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center in Massachusetts, where he helped develop expendable parachutes for the Vietnam War.

Video Oral History Interview with David Richards, Section A2017_044_001_004, TRT: 4:28:16 ?

David Richards became the U.S. Army's first African American warrant officer in 1968. He continued his education during his military service, and earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Park College in Parkville,

Missouri in 1975. Three years later, he earned a master's degree in human resources from Pepperdine University, and began teaching at Saint Leo College. In 1983, Richards retired from the U.S. Army as the only African American chief warrant officer, and was inducted into the Parachute Rigger Warrant Officer's Hall of Fame. He then settled with his wife in Savannah, Georgia. Richards worked briefly in sales at the Savannah Tribune, before starting a career at the Savannah-Chatham Metropolitan Police Department. After a few years in staffing, he became a crime prevention analyst. Richards continued teaching as an adjunct professor at Saint Leo University until 2000, and was an active member of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity and 100 Black Men of Savannah, Inc.

Video Oral History Interview with David Richards, Section A2017_044_001_005, TRT: 5:31:14 ?

David Richards served as a warrant officer in the U.S. Army from 1968 to 1983. He encouraged all the troops under his command to pursue an education, and provided them with time to attend classes in the afternoons. Years later, Richards was honored by a former student, who appointed him as marshal of the annual Veteran's Council parade in Chatham County, Georgia. In addition to his military service, Richards was involved in numerous organizations, including the NAACP, American Legion and Military Officers Association of America. He also served as a jury commissioner and the vice chairman of Gateway Behavioral Health Services, which provided assistance to people struggling with substance abuse. Richards also served as the board director for the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum in Savannah, Georgia. Richards reflects upon his legacy and his advice to future generations. He describes how he would like to be remembered, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.