

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Maj. Gen. Nathaniel James

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	James, Nathaniel, 1935-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Maj. Gen. Nathaniel James,
Dates:	July 31, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:53:38).
Abstract:	Major general Maj. Gen. Nathaniel James (1935 - 2020) the first African American obtain that rank of Major General in the New York Army National Guard, is the founder and president of both the 369th Historical Society and the 369th Veterans Association. James was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 31, 2012, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_200
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Military Officer Nathaniel James is the former commanding General of the New York Army National Guard. Born on July 28, 1935, in the Branchville, South Carolina, his family migrated north to New York City during his childhood. James received early schooling in the New York City Public School system, and attended Theodore Roosevelt High School before graduating from Bronx Vocational High School. James then enrolled at the State University of New York, earning his A.A. degree in business and his B.A. degree in political science. After completing the ROTC training in college and subsequent two years of enlisted service, James was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in 1959, through the Army Artillery and Missile School.

During his 33 year career, James held a variety of positions and continued to develop his institutional knowledge of Army command, operations and strategy. James' military education includes the Army Artillery and Missile School; Army Transportation School; Army Command and General Staff College; Army War College; and the National Interagency Counter Drugs Institute. In 1975, James became the commander for the 369th Transportation Battalion, 42nd Division Artillery and 42nd Division Support Command. Between 1988 and 1992, he served as the assistant adjutant general, Headquarters State Area Command, New York Army National Guard. Promoted to Major General on December 29, 1992, James became the first African American to obtain that rank in the history of the New York Army National Guard.

In addition to previously commanding the 369th Transportation Battalion James is the founder and president of both the 369th Veteran's Association, Inc. and the 369th Historical Society, Inc. The 369th Regiment was originally called the 15th New York Infantry and they were the first African American regiment to engage in combat during World War II. After the war, 171 soldiers in that regiment were awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French Government, and German soldiers gave them the name, "Harlem Hell Fighters," for the courage and valor they displayed in battle. James maintains hundreds of photographs and dozens of artifacts, papers, and other items to honor the legacy of the 369th Regiment.

James' military decorations and awards include, Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation, Armed Forces Reserve Medal, the Army Achievement Medal, the National Defense Medal, and the New York Humanitarian Service Medal.

Nathaniel James was interviewed by the *The HistoryMakers* on August 1, 2012.

James passed away on February 19, 2020.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Maj. Gen. Nathaniel James was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 31, 2012, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Major general Maj. Gen. Nathaniel James (1935 - 2020) the first African American obtain that rank of Major General in the New York Army National Guard, is the founder and president of both the 369th Historical Society and the 369th Veterans Association.

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:

James, Nathaniel, 1935-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
James, Nathaniel, 1935- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. Army

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 Maj. Gen. Nathaniel James, July 31, 2012. 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 Maj. Gen. Nathaniel James, Section A2012_200_001_001, TRT: 1:29:47 ?

Nathaniel James describes his family background. James' parents, Reva Marie Myers and Alexander James, were born in Branchville, South Carolina in 1905 and 1909, respectively. His maternal grandmother was Della Grimes. However, James did not know his maternal grandfather. Both his mother and father's families worked as sharecroppers in the South. In addition, James' father worked on the railroad. He describes the hardships his father and others faced working as sharecroppers and on the railroad. James' family, which included eight siblings, migrated to New York City when he was a child. He recalls the train ride north and living in his uncle's flat in Harlem, as some of his earliest childhood memories.

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Video Oral History Interview with Maj. Gen. Nathaniel James, Section A2012_200_001_002, TRT: 2:29:18 ?

Nathaniel James and his siblings attended several schools in Harlem and then the Bronx in New York City. James discusses his elementary school experiences and describes what it was like to attend the predominantly white school, P.S. 6 in the Bronx. Here, the teachers paid more attention to what the students learned. James describes his childhood hobbies and his proclivity towards mechanics and engineering. He had learned how to fix things from working with his dad, who was a building superintendent. In 1949, James began attending Bronx Vocational High School where he studied sheet metal design. He also played high school varsity basketball and handball. James recalls an incident where he was sent home early after hitting a student who used a racial slur.

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Video Oral History Interview with Maj. Gen. Nathaniel James, Section A2012_200_001_003, TRT: 3:30:12 ?

Nathaniel James talks about enlisting in the New York Army National Guard's 369th Infantry Regiment in 1953--shortly after his senior year in high school. He describes the state of race relations in the U.S. Army at that time. Although, acts of racial prejudice were prohibited by the U.S. Army, they still occurred. James describes his work as a Graves Registration Specialist in the Army, as well as his work at the phone company NYNEX after he left the Army. James talks about meeting his wife and going to night school at Fordham University in the Bronx where he took computer science courses and eventually earned his associates and bachelor's degree from the State University of New York in business and political science, respectively. Afterwards, James qualified for a

promotion to the rank of General.

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Video Oral History Interview with Maj. Gen. Nathaniel James, Section A2012_200_001_004, TRT: 4:30:32 ?

Nathaniel James talks about his interest in becoming a General. He also describes the advocacy efforts of the Black Officers Association, which was formed in the early 1980s to address prejudicial treatment of black officers and encourage their promotion to higher ranks. James talks about the first African American who became Brigadier General of the New York Army National Guard as a result of the association's work. James also describes his rise to the rank of Major General of the New York Army National Guard in 1992; detailing his command of the 369th Infantry Regiment and 42nd Division Artillery. James talks about his various responsibilities as a Two-Star General and how he relieved an ineffective Battalion Commander of his duties.

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Video Oral History Interview with Maj. Gen. Nathaniel James, Section A2012_200_001_005, TRT: 5:33:54 ?

Nathaniel James discusses his experience as an African American Two-Star General in the New York Army National Guard. In 1960, James and Williams Miles founded the 369th Infantry Regiment Historical Society to showcase the work of African American soldiers who served in the infantry. James talks about how the society was formed, as well as its operations and growth over the years. James retired from the New York Army National Guard in 1995 at the age of sixty. Then, in 1997, he worked to have a monument erected in Sechault, France in honor of the 369th Infantry Regiment's valiant efforts during World War I. Almost ten years later, a second monument was erected in New York City in honor of the 369th Infantry Regiment.

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Video Oral History Interview with Maj. Gen. Nathaniel James, Section A2012_200_001_006, TRT: 6:19:55 ?

Nathaniel James talks about the creation of the second 369th Infantry Regiment monument and the difficulty he had in moving the monument from Germany to the United States. He also talks about those who attended the monument's dedication, like Mayor Michael Bloomberg. James then discusses his late friend, William Miles, who helped him found the 369th Infantry Regiment Historical Society. He also mentions the film "Stormy Weather," where Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson plays the role of a soldier from the 369th Infantry Regiment. James

ends the interview by speaking about his wife and family--including his older brother; his hopes and concerns for the African American community; his legacy, and how he would like to be remembered.

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