

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Chalmers Archer, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Archer, Chalmers, 1928-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Chalmers Archer, Jr.,
Dates:	July 12, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012
Physical Description:	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:02:55).
Abstract:	Soldier and psychology professor Chalmers Archer, Jr. (1928 - 2014) joined the newly formed United States Army's Special Forces in 1952 and was one of the first units to enter Vietnam in 1957. He was the author of two memoirs, 'Growing up Black in Rural Mississippi' and 'Green Berets in the Vanguard'. Archer was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 12, 2012, in Manassas, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_147
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Combat medical technician, author and education administrator Chalmers Archer, Jr. was born on April 21, 1928 in Tchula, Mississippi to Eva R. Archer, a teacher and Chalmers Archer, Sr., a farmer. As a child, his father and uncles rented a hilltop of more than four hundred acres known as the "Place", where they farmed, cultivated orchards, raised livestock and built smokehouses. The land was sold when Archer was twelve years old and his family moved to Lexington, Mississippi. After graduating from Ambrose High School, he attended Tuskegee

University for one year before volunteering for the United States Army Air Corps. Archer was in the United States Army Air Corps for one year and then transferred to the Army. He served on a medical crew as a master sergeant technician during the Korean War, where his unit's job was to retrieve wounded soldiers. In 1952, Archer began training at Fort Bragg's Psychological Warfare Center as part of the newly formed United States Army's Special Forces. His unit was one of the first to enter Vietnam where he trained original Special Forces teams of the South Vietnamese army. On October 21, 1957, Archer's unit was ambushed and he witnessed the first American combat deaths in Vietnam, as well saving the lives of American and Vietnamese soldiers. He did not see action in Vietnam again, however, he did see action in Cambodia and Laos. Archer went on to serve in the Philippines, Hawaii, Korea, Taiwan, and Panama, as well as in Southeast Asia. He ended his army service in 1967 and went back to school, receiving his B.S. degree from the Tuskegee Institute in 1972. Archer earned his M.Ed. degree in 1974 and his Ph.D. degree in counseling and psychology from Auburn University in 1979. He then completed a twelve month, post-graduate study at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. In 1983, Archer became a professor of counseling and psychology at Northern Virginia Community College. He later served as assistant to the president at Saints Junior College in Lexington, Mississippi and assistant to the vice president at the Tuskegee Institute.

Archer wrote two memoirs, *Growing up Black in Rural Mississippi* published in 1991 and *Green Berets in the Vanguard* published in 2001. He received the Afro-Achievement Award in 1994 for distinguished lifetime achievement in education from the Dale City Afro-Achievement Committee. Archer also served as president of the Jennie Dean Project.

Archer passed away on February 24, 2014, at the age of 85.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Chalmers Archer, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 12, 2012, in Manassas, Virginia, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Soldier and psychology professor Chalmers Archer, Jr. (1928 - 2014) joined the newly formed United States Army's Special Forces in 1952 and was one of the first units to enter Vietnam in 1957. He was the author of two memoirs, 'Growing up Black in Rural Mississippi' and 'Green Berets in the Vanguard'.

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:

Archer, Chalmers, 1928-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Archer, Chalmers, 1928---Interviews

United States--Armed Forces--African Americans--Interviews.

African American psychologists--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Soldier

Psychology Professor

HistoryMakers® Category:

MilitaryMakers|EducationMakers

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 Chalmers Archer, Jr., July 12, 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 2/5/2020 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 Chalmers Archer, Jr., Section A2012_147_001_001, TRT: 1:29:07 2012/07/12

Chalmers Archer describes his family background. His mother, Eva R. Archer, grew up in Lexington, Mississippi in the home of a white family that her mother, Lucy Palm, cooked for. She attended Ambrose Vocational High School--the same school as her son. Archer's mother became a teacher and later earned her master's in library science from Mississippi State University. Archer also remembers his maternal great-grandmother, Dina Suma Redmond, who took care of him when he was a child. Redmond was a former slave born in Tchula, Mississippi. Archer talks about his book, "Growing up Black in Rural Mississippi", and how he was not permitted to hold a book signing in Tchula because of the town's racial climate. Archer's father, Chalmers Archer, Sr. was born in Mount Olive, Mississippi and only attended school to the eighth grade. Archer recalls the story his father told him about his paternal grandfather during slavery, which he included in his book.

African American families--Mississippi.

African American mothers--Mississippi.

African American grandmothers.

Slavery--Mississippi.

African American fathers--Mississippi.

Video Oral History Interview with Chalmers Archer, Jr., Section
A2012_147_001_002, TRT: 2:28:39 2012/07/12

Chalmers Archer talks about the stories his father told him about growing up on a farm in the South. Archer also discusses how his family came to rent and live on a hilltop of more than one hundred acres in Mississippi, known as "The Place". He talks about his relationship with his maternal grandparents and not having the opportunity to know his paternal grandparents because they died before he was born. Archer's father served in World War I and became a captain in the U.S. He recalls his father's stories about the racist treatment of black soldiers in the service at Camp Shelby in Mississippi. Archer also talks about his father going to hear, educator and orator, Booker T. Washington speak at Mound Bayou. In addition, he talks about his siblings and how his parents met.

African American fathers--Mississippi.

African American families--Mississippi.

Farm life--Mississippi.

World War, 1914-1918--Participation, African American.

Washington, Booker T., 1856-1915.

Video Oral History Interview with Chalmers Archer, Jr., Section
A2012_147_001_003, TRT: 3:29:08 2012/07/12

Chalmers Archer talks about his brother, Ansalem Archer and his father's restaurant. He also points out that his mother and the women on her side of the family were all good cooks. Archer describes his parents' personalities and talks about he and his sibling's college plans. Archer describes the sights, sounds and smells of growing up in Mississippi. Additionally, he talks about his uncles, Perry Archer and Nicholas Archer who lived at "The Place" with his family. His Uncle Perry was a minister and married Archer's parents, while his Uncle Nick was a skilled blacksmith and carpenter. Archer was twelve years

old when his family moved to Lexington, Mississippi. He talks about the barn fire at his family home in Lexington and the terrible smell it left. Archer recalls the differences between growing up white and growing up black in Mississippi, as well as the lack of rights blacks had in the state. Archer also talks about the schools he attended as a child.

Video Oral History Interview with Chalmers Archer, Jr., Section A2012_147_001_004, TRT: 4:28:41 2012/07/12

Chalmers Archer discusses his elementary school experience at Rose Hill in Mississippi. Archer remembers the various fruit orchards his family tended and cultivated while living on "The Place". He also talks about having to leave the land when it was sold to a white family. Archer discusses his father's involvement with the U.S. Federal Housing Administration's Farm Security Administration, which enabled him to buy farmland in Lexington, Mississippi. Archer attended Ambrose Vocational High School and graduated valedictorian of his class in 1945. He describes his high school experience, as well as the gunfight he got into with a white gang called the Alley Cats. Following the shootout, Archer's father sent him to live with relatives in Detroit, Michigan for the summer, while things at home in Lexington settled down.

Video Oral History Interview with Chalmers Archer, Jr., Section A2012_147_001_005, TRT: 5:29:22 2012/07/12

Chalmers Archer talks about spending his summer in Detroit, Michigan after being involved in a gunfight in Lexington, Mississippi. Archer attended Tuskegee University in Alabama for one year before joining the United States Army Air Corps. He talks about his coursework and mentor at Tuskegee University, Dr. C.G. Gomillion. Archer talks about the Tuskegee Airmen and his tour of duty in the Philippines, where former President Manuel Roxas ordered all blacks to evacuate the country. He also discusses his basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, as well as why he decided to become an army medic. In addition, he describes his combat experience in World War II, the integration of the U.S. Armed Forces and the Korean War.

Video Oral History Interview with Chalmers Archer, Jr., Section
A2012_147_001_006, TRT: 6:29:21 2012/07/12

Chalmers Archer discusses his experience with integration in the military, following the issuance of Executive Order 9981 by President Harry S. Truman in 1948. He recalls getting into a number of fights and even breaking his nose from the resentment and racism that resulted from the integrated units. In 1952, Archer trained at Fort Bragg's Psychological Warfare Center as part of the newly formed U.S. Army's Special Forces. His unit was one of the first to enter Vietnam where he trained original Special Forces teams. Archer describes his missions in Southeast Asia and Japan, as well as his service during the Vietnam War. Archer provided medical care to the first soldier killed in Vietnam, Captain Harry Griffith Cramer Jr.; Griffith died in Archer's arms.

Video Oral History Interview with Chalmers Archer, Jr., Section
A2012_147_001_007, TRT: 7:31:50 2012/07/12

Chalmers Archer talks about his involvement with the civil rights protests in Mississippi during the late 1960s. Archer talks about learning of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968 and the students who were shot at Jackson State University in 1970. After ending his army service in 1967, Archer returned to school where he received his B.S. degree from the Tuskegee Institute in 1972. Additionally, he earned his Ph.D. degree in counseling and psychology from Auburn University in 1979 and completed his post-graduate studies at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. In 1983, Archer became a professor of counseling and psychology at Northern Virginia Community College. Archer concluded this part of the interview by discussing the two books he wrote, "Growing Up Black in Mississippi"--published in 1991 and "Green Berets in the Vanguard"--published in 2001.

Video Oral History Interview with Chalmers Archer, Jr., Section
A2012_147_001_008, TRT: 8:36:47 2012/07/12

Chalmers Archer traveled to Thailand as part of his service with the U.S. Special Forces in Southeast Asia. He talks about his conversation with the King of Thailand

regarding the desegregation of U.S. schools. Archer also talks about how his first book, "Growing Up Black in Rural Mississippi," was received, his teaching career at Tuskegee Institute and Northern Virginia Community College, and his regret for not pursuing a career in farming. Archer talks about his legacy; as well as his hopes and concerns for the black community. He speaks about his parents' thoughts on his career and his close relationship with his siblings. In addition, Archer reflects on the social changes that have occurred for blacks in the military and his hometown of Mississippi. Finally, Archer talks about how he would like to be remembered and describes the photographs of his family, military life and teaching career.