

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Col. William R. Thompson

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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>	Thompson, William R., 1916-2006
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Col. William R. Thompson,
<b>Dates:</b>	May 9, 2000
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2000
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:28:02).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Tuskegee airman Col. William R. Thompson (1916 - 2006 ) was an armament officer in the 99th Squadron of the Tuskegee Airmen. Thompson also served as unofficial photographer for the 99th Squadron and parts of his collection now reside in the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. Thompson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 9, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2000_039
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born on January 26, 1916, Lieutenant Colonel William R. Thompson was born in the Wiley Avenue section of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the son of a prosperous caterer. His mother died when he was fourteen days old.

Thompson received his B.S. in business administration from Hampton University in Virginia. During his senior year, he became a licensed pilot and entered the service in 1940 as one of the first African American aviation cadets admitted to the U.S. Army Air Corps. These cadets were later known as members of the 99th Squadron of the Tuskegee Airmen. As part of the 99th Squadron, Thompson served as an armament officer under the guidance of Benjamin Davis. He also served as unofficial photographer for the 99th Squadron and parts of his collection now reside in the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

After Thompson returned from the war he moved to Chicago and worked for Johnson Publication in the promotions department. Thompson passed away on Saturday, April 15, 2006 at the age of 90.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Col. William R. Thompson was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on May 9, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Tuskegee airman Col. William R. Thompson (1916 - 2006 ) was an armament officer in the 99th Squadron of the Tuskegee Airmen. Thompson also served as unofficial photographer for the 99th Squadron and parts of his collection now reside in the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

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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:

Thompson, William R., 1916-2006

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Thompson, William R., 1916-2006--Interviews

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United States. Army Air Forces--African American troops--Interviews.

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

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United States--Army--African Americans--Social conditions--20th century.

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Mothers--Death--Psychological aspects.

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Hampton University (Va.).

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Lincoln University (Pa.).

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World War, 1939-1945--Aerial operations, American.

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World War, 1939-1945--Personal narratives.

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African American photographers--Interviews.

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Johnson Products Co.

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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 Air Forces. Fighter Group, 332nd.

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## **Occupations:**

Tuskegee Airman

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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 Col. William R. Thompson, May 9, 2000. 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).

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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 Col. William R. Thompson, Section A2000\_039\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:11 ?

Lieutenant Colonel William R. Thompson recalls his father, a railroad dining car worker or chef from Durham, North Carolina, who moved to Pittsburgh and established a successful catering business. Thompson explains that his mother died when he was an infant and his childhood was spent moving around to different relatives. He also talks about his siblings and some other relatives. He tells of the great admiration he had in his youth for the early aviators and his disappointment in later learning about his heroes' racial prejudice.

African American soldiers--Interviews.

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

United States. Army--African American troops--Social conditions--20th century.

Mothers--Death--Psychological aspects.

Hampton University (Va.).

Lincoln University (Pa.).

World War, 1939-1945--Aerial operations, American.

World War, 1939-1945--Personal narratives.

African American photographers--Interviews.

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Video Oral History Interview with Col. William R. Thompson, Section A2000\_039\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:21 ?

William R. Thompson talks about his youth in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he grew up near the University of Pittsburgh and his family took in students and professors as lodgers. Thompson recalls attending integrated schools and developing an early interest in aviation. He tells how he attempted to volunteer for the Army Air Corps after high school but was turned away because they were not accepting blacks. Instead, he went to college. He describes his experiences at Hampton University in Virginia, from which he graduated in 1940, and at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, which he attended for a year.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. William R. Thompson, Section A2000\_039\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:11 ?

William R. Thompson talks about his experiences as a weapons officer with the U.S. Army Air Force 99th Fighter Squadron of the Tuskegee Airmen during World War Two. He talks about his training at Chanute Base, seeing Eleanor Roosevelt fly with a black pilot at Tuskegee, the squadron being shipped to Casablanca and their service in North Africa, Sicily and Italy.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. William R. Thompson, Section A2000\_039\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:56 ?

William R. Thompson continues to talk about his experiences as a weapons officer with the U. S. Army Air Force 99th Fighter Squadron of the Tuskegee Airmen during World War Two. Thompson shares memories of commanders

Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. and George S. 'Spanky' Roberts and flyers including Hannibal Cox and Lee Archer. Thompson goes on to relate his experiences after the war, when he moved to Chicago and worked on promotion for John H. Johnson's new magazine, Ebony. Thompson then discusses his wife and his extended family.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. William R. Thompson, Section A2000\_039\_001\_005, TRT: 0:26:23 ?

William R. Thompson talks about his role as unofficial photographer and archivist of the Tuskegee Airmen, and his donation of his collection of photographs to the Tuskegee Airmen exhibit at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. He tells about the recognition he receives today for having been a Tuskegee Airman, and his volunteer work with youth, both as part of the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. organization and as a mentor to individual young men. He calls for more African American political participation, more involvement with mentoring, and a national service program for youth. He also speaks about his sons and other family members.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. William R. Thompson, Section A2000\_039\_001\_006, TRT: ?

Video Oral History Interview with Col. William R. Thompson, Section A2000\_039\_001\_007, TRT: ?