

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sgt. Johnny Holmes

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Holmes, Johnny, 1921-2013 |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sgt. Johnny Holmes, |
| Dates: | December 12, 2006 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2006 |
| Physical Description: | 5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:02:53). |
| Abstract: | Sergeant Sgt. Johnny Holmes (1921 - 2013) served in World War II with the all black 761st Tank Battalion of the U.S. Army. Holmes was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 12, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2006_161 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

United State Army 761st Tank Battalion “Black Panther” Sergeant Johnny Alfred “Bobo” Holmes was born on September 3, 1921 in Alliance, Ohio. Growing up in Alliance and Evanston, Illinois, Holmes attended Freedom Elementary School and Evanston Township High School from 1938 to 1939.

Joining the United States Army in 1939, Holmes experienced intense racism for the first time. After the onset of World War II, Holmes was chosen to become a part of the all black 761st Tank Battalion. Like the Tuskegee Airmen, this unit was intended by American reformers to be a step towards integrating the United States armed forces. Training in Custer, Michigan, Fort Knox Kentucky, Camp Claiborne, Louisiana and finally at Fort Hood, Texas, Holmes learned all the nuances of the M4 tank. Beginning in November of 1944, the 761st Tank Battalion under General Patton’s command engaged the enemy for 183 straight days, spearheading many of Patton’s offensives at the Battle of the Bulge and in six European countries. “Patton’s Panthers” lived up to their motto, “Come Out Fighting” defeating 6,000 enemy soldiers, capturing thirty towns and in 1945 liberating Jewish prisoners from concentration camps at Dachau, Lambach and Buchenwald.

In 1946, Holmes returned to private life, working for the City of Chicago. He retired from the Doehler Corporation, married twice and became involved in real estate.

Johnny Holmes was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 12, 2006.

Holmes passed away on March 22, 2013 at the age of 91.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sgt. Johnny Holmes was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 12, 2006, in

Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Sergeant Sgt. Johnny Holmes (1921 - 2013) served in World War II with the all black 761st Tank Battalion of the U.S. Army.

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:

Holmes, Johnny, 1921-2013

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Holmes, Johnny, 1921-2013 --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. Army

Occupations:

Sergeant

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 Sgt. Johnny Holmes, December 12, 2006. 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 Sgt. Johnny Holmes, Section A2006_161_001_001, TRT: 0:29:19 ?

Sergeant Johnny Holmes was born September 3, 1921 in Alliance, Ohio to John Burnett Holmes and Anna Marie Hudson. Holmes never met his maternal grandparents, although he recalls his great aunt. His mother was born around 1900 in Alabama and later moved to Alliance, Ohio, where she worked at Akron Typesetting Company. She and Holmes' stepfather distilled bootleg whiskey during the Prohibition Era, a skill she passed on to her son. Holmes recalls growing up on Lake Park Boulevard in Alliance, Ohio. He lived in an integrated neighborhood, where many of his childhood friends were white. Holmes recalls

some of the sights of his neighborhood, including the small, wood frame houses, as well as the long distances he walked. Holmes' father was born in Richmond, Virginia, the son of a Baptist minister, Reverend John Holmes. Holmes did not meet his father until he was fourteen years old, when Holmes and his sister moved to Evanston, Illinois to live with him. His father passed away in the mid-1940s.

Video Oral History Interview with Sgt. Johnny Holmes, Section A2006_161_001_002, TRT: 0:29:02 ?

Sergeant Johnny Holmes describes his early life in Alliance, Ohio in the 1920s. Holmes attended the integrated Freedom Elementary School, and recalls having an interest in warfare at a young age. When Holmes was fourteen, he moved to Evanston, Illinois to attend Evanston Township High School and to live with his father, John Holmes. While in high school, Holmes received top grades, enjoyed history and math, and was a member of the track team. He first encountered racial discrimination during high school, although not at his integrated school, but from white southerners who moved to Evanston. Holmes left high school without graduating in 1939. He joined the U.S. military with a strong desire to serve his country. Holmes trained at a military base in Custer, Michigan, before being assigned to the 758th Tank Battalion. He credits civil rights activist Mary McLeod Bethune with securing the opportunity for African Americans to join tank battalions.

Video Oral History Interview with Sgt. Johnny Holmes, Section A2006_161_001_003, TRT: 0:28:29 ?

Sergeant Johnny Holmes describes the formation of the 758th Tank Battalion during his military training in Custer, Michigan. Holmes was made a staff sergeant and sent to learn to operate M3 tanks at Camp Claiborne in Rapides Parish, Louisiana, where he joined the newly formed 761st Tank Battalion. From 1940 to 1944, Holmes trained at four military bases, and was finally deployed to World War II from Fort Hood, Texas. Holmes recalls the racial discrimination he faced as a member of the 761st Battalion, and describes how his outlook was changed by the murders of African American soldiers at military bases in the South. In Europe, Holmes fought in such major battles as the Battle of Metz. He explains that the U.S. military often provided the 761st Battalion with inferior equipment, resulting in heavy death tolls. Holmes and the soldiers of the 761st Tank Battalion were among the first U.S. military units to arrive at the concentration camps in Germany.

Video Oral History Interview with Sgt. Johnny Holmes, Section A2006_161_001_004, TRT: 0:28:21 ?

Sergeant Johnny Holmes describes what he witnessed in 1944 as a liberator of the concentration camp in Wels, Austria, and explains the philosophy of survival that warfare demands. In 1945, Holmes was honorably discharged and returned to the United States, where he adjusted to civilian life with ease. He was employed briefly by the Doehler-Jarvis Company in Chicago, Illinois, and then worked for the City of Chicago Department of Streets and Sanitation. In 1949, Holmes married his first wife, Louise Bradshaw Holmes. He later married Anne Smith Holmes. In 1978, President James Earl "Jimmy" Carter, Jr. awarded the 761st Tank Battalion the Presidential Unit Citation, thirty-three years after Holmes' discharge. Holmes shares his opinions regarding warfare, as well as his perspective on the Iraq War. Holmes considers his legacy to be his family, namely his two children, Anita Holmes Berlanga and Michael Holmes. He gives advice to young soldiers, and describes how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Sgt. Johnny Holmes, Section A2006_161_001_005, TRT:

0:07:42 ?

Sergeant Johnny Holmes narrates his photographs.