

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr.

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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>	Bolden, Charles, 1946 -
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr.,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 28, 2012 and February 3, 2017
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2012 and 2017
<b>Physical Description:</b>	9 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:19:54).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Aerospace engineer and major general Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr. (1946 - ) served in the United States Marine Corps and was a pioneering astronaut with NASA, where he also served as administrator. Bolden was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 28, 2012 and February 3, 2017, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2012_229
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Aerospace engineer and major general (ret.) Charles F. Bolden, Jr. was born on August 19, 1946 in Columbia, South Carolina. He graduated from C.A. Johnson High School in 1964. Both of his parents, Charles and Ethel Bolden, were teachers and stressed the importance of education. Bolden received his B.S. degree in electrical science from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1968, and earned his M.S. degree in systems management from the University of Southern California in 1977. He then accepted a commission as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps following graduation from the Naval Academy and underwent flight training at Pensacola, Florida, Meridian, Mississippi, and Kingsville, Texas.

Between June 1972 and June 1973, Bolden flew more than 100 combat missions into North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in the A-6A Intruder while stationed in Nam Phong, Thailand. After returning to the United States, Bolden served in a variety of positions in the Marine Corps. He was then assigned to the Naval Test Pilot School at Patuxent River, Maryland, where he completed his training in 1979. While working at the Naval Air Test Center's Systems Engineering and Strike Aircraft Test Directorates, he tested a variety of ground attack aircraft until his selection as an astronaut candidate in 1980. Bolden's NASA astronautical career included technical assignments. He served as pilot on the Space Shuttle *Columbia* in 1986. In the wake of the *Challenger* disaster, he was assigned as the chief of the Safety Division. In 1990, he piloted the Space Shuttle *Discovery* during its mission to deploy the Hubble Space Telescope. Bolden served as the Mission Commander for Space Shuttle *Atlantis* in 1992 and the Space Shuttle *Discovery* in 1994. He logged more than 680 hours during these four flights. Bolden left NASA and returned to the U.S. Marine Corps in 1997, and was assigned as the Deputy Commandment of Midshipmen at the Naval Academy. During Operation Desert Thunder-Kuwait in 1998, he was assigned as the Commanding General of the Marine Expeditionary Force. He was promoted to Major General in 1998. In 2003, Bolden retired from the Marine Corps and served as president of the American PureTex Water Corporation. In 2009, President Barack Obama appointed Bolden as the top NASA administrator, making him the second astronaut and the first African American to serve in this position. Bolden's military decorations include the

Defense Superior Service Medal and the Distinguished Flying Cross. NASA awarded him the Exceptional Service Award in 1988, 1989, and 1991. In May of 2006, he was inducted into the U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame.

Bolden and his wife, Alexis Walker, live in Alexandria, Virginia. They have two children: U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Anthony Bolden, and Michelle Bolden, M.D. Charles Bolden was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 28, 2012 and February 3, 2017/

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 28, 2012 and February 3, 2017, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Aerospace engineer and major general Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr. (1946 - ) served in the United States Marine Corps and was a pioneering astronaut with NASA, where he also served as administrator.

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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:

Bolden, Charles, 1946 -

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Bolden, Charles, 1946 ---Interviews

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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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National Aeronautics and Space Administration

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United States. Army

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## Occupations:

Aerospace Engineer

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Major General

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MilitaryMakers|ScienceMakers

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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 Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr., August 28, 2012 and February 3, 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).

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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 Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr., Section A2012\_229\_001\_001,  
TRT: 1:31:49 ?

Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr. begins by describing his current and former professional capacities, his list of favorites, and his family background. Bolden's mother, Ethel Martin, was born in Charleston, South Carolina, in December, 1917. Bolden's father, Charles Bolden, Sr., was born in Columbia, South Carolina, also in December, 1917. Both Bolden's parents attended high school in Columbia, followed by college at Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina. Afterward, Ethel Martin established a career as a librarian in Columbia. Charles Bolden, Sr., served in World War II; after returning from the war, he built an illustrious career coaching high school football in Columbia. Bolden describes his childhood memories with his parents and his brother, Warren, in the Waverly district of Columbia. He graduated from high school in 1965, and then joined the Naval Academy. Bolden and his wife, Jackie, got married three days after he graduated from the Naval Academy.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr., Section A2012\_229\_001\_002,  
TRT: 2:29:06 ?

Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr. describes his early interest in science and mathematics, which was further cultivated through the encouragement that he received from his parents and school teachers. Bolden played on his high school football team, coached by his father, Charles Bolden, Sr. As early as the seventh grade, Bolden decided to join the United States Naval Academy following high school. He sent several letters to congressmen, senators, and to the vice president, expressing his intent. In 1964, Bolden joined the Naval Academy as one of seven African American cadets in his matriculating class. Bolden's encounter with segregation was particularly significant during his years in Maryland. His success at the Academy was influenced by the mentorship that he received from senior African American cadets, and from his adopted mother, Lilly Mae Chase. Bolden graduated from the Naval Academy in 1968, and served in the Marine Corps for thirty-four years.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

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Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr., Section A2012\_229\_001\_003,  
TRT: 3:29:20 ?

Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr. describes his career in the United States Marine Corps. He graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1968, with a bachelor of science in naval science, and a minor in electrical science. Soon after graduation, Bolden married his high-school sweetheart, Alexis (Jackie) Walker. Following in the footsteps of his early mentor from the Naval Academy, Major John Riley Love, Bolden joined the Marine Corps in 1968. After flight training, he chose to fly the A-6 Intruder class of attack aircraft. Bolden enlisted in the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, and was deployed from 1972 to 1973. Upon his return to the U.S., Bolden served in California in several capacities, including as a Marine Corps recruiter in Los Angeles, on the A-6 squadron at Marine Corps Air Station in El Toro, and then as the executive officer at Marine Air Base Squadron 13, or MABS 13.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr., Section A2012\_229\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:31 ?

Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr. describes his career path following his return from the Vietnam War in 1973. While stationed on duty in California, Bolden pursued a Master of Science and Systems Management through the University of Southern California, completing the program through on-base venues of instruction. From 1978 to 1979, Bolden trained to become a test pilot with the Marine Corps. His aspirations toward space science came from a meeting with Dr. Ronald McNair, a pioneer amongst African American astronauts. McNair's success story inspired Bolden to apply to NASA's Astronaut Program, and he was selected to the program in 1980. Bolden successfully completed his first space mission aboard the Space Shuttle Columbia in January, 1986, becoming the fourth African American to travel into space.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr., Section A2012\_229\_002\_005, TRT: 5:30:34 ?

Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr. enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps following his graduation from the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. He then attended flight school, where he met Ronald McNair and was persuaded to become an astronaut with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Bolden's first trip to space was aboard the Space Shuttle Columbia for the STS-61-C mission in 1986. The crew included the first Costa Rican born astronaut, Franklin Chang Diaz, and two politicians, Jake Garn and Bill Nelson. Due to inclement weather at the John F. Kennedy Space Center, the mission was extended by three days and the crew were finally able to land on January 18, 1968 at Edwards Air Force Base. Ten days later, Bolden and his crewmates witnessed the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster while completing their debriefing in Houston. At this point of the interview, Bolden remembers NASA mathematician Katherine G. Johnson and her impact on the space shuttle program.

Video Oral History Interview with Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr., Section A2012\_229\_002\_006,  
TRT: 6:30:26 ?

Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr. was named chief officer of the Safety Division at the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas in 1987. In this position, Bolden worked to improve both the industrial and operational safety within NASA's shuttle programs. After three years, Bolden left the position to return to space travel as the pilot aboard the Space Shuttle Discovery in April of 1990. On this mission, Bolden and his fellow crew members launched the Hubble Space Telescope into its orbit around the Earth. At this point of the interview, Bolden describes NASA's numbering system and the history of its Shuttle Transportation System. In 1992, Bolden served as the mission commander aboard the Space Shuttle Atlantis, which was a scientific mission that included thirteen experiments to measure and observe different aspects of Earth and its atmosphere. Upon his return, Bolden was named assistant deputy administrator at the NASA Headquarters in Washington, D.C., where he worked with Congressman John Lewis.

Video Oral History Interview with Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr., Section A2012\_229\_002\_007,  
TRT: 7:30:25 ?

Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr. lobbied with the U.S. Congress to raise support and funding for NASA during his year at the NASA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. In 1992, Bolden began training for his last shuttle mission aboard the Space Shuttle Discovery, which was the first flight to have American, Russian and Belgian astronauts together on one shuttle. Although hesitant at first, Bolden and the other crew members, which included Russian cosmonauts Sergei Krikaley and Vladimir G. Titov and Belgian astronaut Dirk Frimout, worked effectively together. At this point, Bolden compares the American and Russian space programs, and highlights the autonomy that is given to Russian cosmonauts. In 1994, Bolden left NASA and returned to the U.S. Marine Corps. He served as the deputy commandant of midshipman at the United States Naval Academy for one year before becoming the assistant wing commander of the Third Marine Aircraft Wing and deputy commanding general of the First Marine Expeditionary Force at Camp Pendleton.

Video Oral History Interview with Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr., Section A2012\_229\_002\_008,  
TRT: 8:29:48 ?

Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr. served as the deputy commanding general of the First Marine Expeditionary Force during Operation Desert Thunder before being promoted to commanding general of the Third Marine Air Wing in 2000. At the time of his retirement in 2003, Bolden was one of only four African American U.S Marine Corps two star generals in service. He then briefly served as the president of the American PureTex Water Corporation before going to work at TechTrans, a language services company. He and his wife, Alexis Walker Bolden, also founded their own consulting business, Jack and Panther LLC. In 2009, Bolden was appointed by President Barack Obama to administrator of NASA. Although NASA traditionally received bipartisan support from the U.S. Congress, Bolden faced opposition from Republicans who were attempting to obstruct the president's motions. In his role as NASA administrator, Bolden worked to improve the status of STEM education within the country and to diversify the administration itself.

Video Oral History Interview with Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr., Section A2012\_229\_002\_009,  
TRT: 9:18:55 ?

Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, Jr. talks about the need to have diversity within NASA, especially the hiring and promotion of African Americans and other

minorities in higher positions within the administration. He then shares his hopes for the future of NASA, including technological advancements in the space program over the next ten years. Bolden reflects upon the state of STEM education in the United States and how that will impact the space program. He then reflects upon his life and shares the message that he gives to children during his school visits and speeches. He describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.