

SMS 1569

7 April 2021

Schreck, Christopher J.

THOMPSON, WILLIAM L.

1970-1973

Linear Ft.: 0.1

Approx. No. Pgs.: 300

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

William LaMont "T" Thompson (born June 14, 1951) was the President and CEO of the United States Air Force Academy's Association of Graduates from 2008 to 2017. A native of Orangeburg, South Carolina, he was one of the first African American students to desegregate the previously all-white Orangeburg High School in 1965. He became the first African American from South Carolina to receive an appointment to the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1969. As a cadet, Thompson participated in a number of activities aimed at improving racial understanding among his fellow students and colleagues at the Academy, including his key role in organizing the Festival of Black Culture held at the Academy campus in January 1972. The Festival was the first event of its kind ever held at a US Service Academy. He was on the Commandant's list, attained the rank of Cadet Lt. Colonel, and served as a member of the Cadet Wing Staff. In addition to his significant social and academic accomplishments, Thompson excelled in both track and field and football in high school and played the receiver position for the Air Force Falcons football team.

After graduation from the academy in 1973 Lieutenant Thompson was appointed to a special assignment as the Minority Affairs Advisor to the Superintendent, through which he was responsible for increasing minority enrollment at the Academy. After a year in this special assignment Thompson entered jet pilot training in Valdosta, Georgia, finishing as the Outstanding Lieutenant in his class. He was selected for immediate entrance into the Air Force Instructor Pilot School and earned a Master Instructor designation during his 7-year tour in the Air Force. In addition to his flying duties, Captain Thompson held numerous positions of increasing responsibility including Deputy Flight Commander, Chief of Wing Life Support, and the President of the Junior Officer's Council. He separated from the service in 1980 to accept a pilot position with Delta Air Lines and relocated to Boston, MA, where he completed his legal studies at Suffolk University and received his Juris Doctor from the University Of The Pacific's McGeorge School of Law.

Captain Thompson enjoyed a twenty-five-year career with Delta Air Lines and served as Commissioner of the Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission. The longest serving

Commissioner in its history, he worked under both Democratic and Republican governors over the span of his career, and was appointed to the Colorado Aeronautical Board in February 2013 by Governor John Hickenlooper. Thompson donated his collection of Air Force Academy materials to the McDermott Library in March 2021.

Sources: *The Times and Democrat*, Orangeburg, South Carolina; Massachusetts Governor's Proclamation, May, 2000; *The Denver Post*, Denver, Colorado; *Falconews*, USAFA, Colorado

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of four folders, comprised primarily of newspaper articles about William L. Thompson and the experience of African Americans at the Air Force Academy in the early 1970s. Other items include articles written by Thompson himself along with some of his colleagues, a photograph of Thompson as a cadet, and a copy of *Ebony* magazine from 1972. Some of these items are still attached to the original scrapbook material on which they were received as removing them may cause severe damage.

Names: Thompson, William L. (Willie "T" Thompson); Harrison, Herb; Gilbert, Bob; Brown, Elliott

Keywords and terms: Cadets; Black Cadets; African Americans; Falcons Football; Sports; Association of Graduates (AOG); Festival of Black Culture; Class of 1973; United States Air Force Academy (USAFA); Colorado Springs, Colorado

ARRANGEMENT AND DESCRIPTION

BOX ONE

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| Folder 1 | Article: "Discussions among Black Cadets at the Air Force Academy," written by William Thompson, Herb Harrison, and Bob Gilbert. No date. Eight pages, typed |
| Folder 2 | Article: "More Black Cadets Become Leaders at Air Force Academy" article written by "jac." Includes excerpts from interviews by Thompson and other black cadets. No date. Six pages, typed |
| Folder 3 | News Articles <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "2 Service Academies: Gets Choice" by Joyce W. Milkie. <i>The Times and Democrat</i>, Orangeburg, South Carolina. 4 May 1969. Includes photo of Thompson |

- “Local Youth Has Not One-But Two-Service Academies to Consider.” Unknown author, unknown date.
- Press release: “Sports.” Concerning Thompson joining the USAF football team as a freshman. No date. Includes a copy of a photograph and a Fall sports schedule
- Photograph of Thompson boarding a plane.
- “AF Cadet to Speak to Youths.” No date. Includes photo of Thompson
- “Willie Thompson Always a Winner” by Douglas Wells. *The Times and Democrat*, no date. Includes photo of Thompson
- “Academy Cadets Arrive for 3rd Lt. Program,” no date
- “Cadet Here to ‘Sell’ Air Force Academy.” Includes photo of Thompson, others
- “Sons Follow Fathers on CU Football Trail” by Frank Haraway. *The Denver Post*, no date
- USAFA Athletic Awards Banquet awards list. Includes Thompson.
- “Air Force Academy Freshman Football Squad” list. Includes Thompson
- “Falcon Frosh Guided by Bowl Game Vets” by Jim Montgomery. *The Free Press*, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 9 October 1969
- “Year of the Falcons” banner
- Air Force Academy 1970 Varsity Football Roster
- “Ultra-Modern School’s Beauty Pervades All” by Joyce W. Milkie. No date. Includes photo of Thompson
- “Cadet Thompson Couldn’t Stand Still at Grid Time.” *The Times and Democrat*, 23 December 1969. Includes photo of Thompson
- “Falcons Take Air in Drill” by Terry Anderson. *The Denver Post*, no date
- “Doesn’t Need Strength,” no date
- “Servicemen in the News,” 2 April 1971. Includes photo of Thompson
- Article by James Beck, Sports Editor. *The Times and Democrat*, 31 December 1970. Includes photo of Thompson
- Untitled photograph and caption from unnamed newspaper. Depicts Thompson in his football uniform
- Notice of news release about William Thompson to his parents from radio station WDIX in Orangeburg, SC. 8 October 1969
- “Cadets Had Black Culture Festival.” *Berkeley Post*, 27 January 1972. Includes a photograph of Thompson and other black cadets
- “AF Cadets Stage Cultural Festival.” *The Afro American*, 29 January 1972. Includes a photograph of Thompson and other black cadets
- “Air Force Black Cadets Display Culture” by Earl Caldwell. *The New York Times*, 18 January 1972. Includes a photo of Thompson
- “Cadet Willie Thompson-He’s the Best” by Marv Caughman. *The Times and Democrat*, no date. Includes photo of Thompson

- “Black Cadet Leaders say Racial Attitudes Improving at AFA.” *The Denver Post*, 3 April 1973. Includes photo of black cadets
- “More Black Hold Wing Leadership Jobs.” *Falconews*, 16 February 1973. Includes photos of Thompson and other black cadets
- “Panel, Films on tap in Black Culture Festival” by Captain Elliot R. Brown. *Falconews*, no date. Includes photo of Thompson and other black cadets
- “Servicemen in the News.” *The Times and Democrat*, 29 January 1973
- “Black AFA Cadets Plan Festival.” *The Denver Post*, no date
- *Changes* newsletter: “Blacks at the Air Force Academy.” Published by the US Air Force Academy, no date. Includes photos of Thompson and other black cadets

Folder 4 *Ebony* Magazine-March 1972. Includes article “The Air Force Academy Blows It’s Mind: For Five Days, the Future Flyboys Fly High on Blackness” page 33-38. Story covers the Festival of Black Culture held at the US Air Force Academy, Includes photos of Thompson, other black cadets, speakers, and instructors