

## Document C: Benjamin Cloud

**Background:** Benjamin “Ben” Cloud, the son of a police officer, was born near San Diego, California, in 1931. He grew up in a middle class family and after high school enrolled at San Diego State College in the Civil Engineering program. During the early 1950s, fearing being drafted into Army service in Korea, he decided to enlist in the Navy.

**Naval Service:** Even as a Naval Officer Candidate, Cloud experienced racism and discrimination. Cloud recalled that he “experienced segregation for the first time” while stationed in Pensacola, Florida, in the early 1950s. “I could not go into certain areas of the Navy Exchange (a department store) and, say, get a haircut. I could not use certain bathrooms and bathing facilities.” Cloud was one of the few African Americans selected to serve in the respected capacity as a Navy aviator. Following a tour in the Pacific, he was sent to the Naval War College to continue his education.

**USS *Kitty Hawk*:** Cloud, a natural leader, was selected to command a squadron and after graduating near the top of his class at the Naval War College, was selected as the Executive Officer (XO) of the aircraft carrier USS *Kitty Hawk*. In 1972 *Kitty Hawk* deployed to Vietnam. In October, when the ship was initially supposed to return from its 8-month deployment, orders came in that the ship was staying in the South Pacific. Tensions were high on the night of October 11 when XO Cloud and fellow officers were watching a movie. A few decks below, chaos broke out and the “grilled cheese” riot began to unfold. During the riot, XO Cloud was in a particularly interesting position. As an African American, Cloud had experienced racism in the Navy, and as the Executive Officer he was one of the few blacks who held a job that demanded respect from black and white sailors alike. In an attempt to calm the angry mob, XO Cloud met with the enlisted sailors. He called on them to remember Martin Luther King, Jr.’s nonviolent strategy of resistance while also holding a clenched fist up in the air, honoring the black power movement. After a tense meeting, sailors returned to work. A somber mood hung over the *Kitty Hawk* for the rest of the ship’s deployment.



Benjamin Cloud, 1964