

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
MADISON DILL

23 AUGUST 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.069

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Albert Gore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
MADISON DILL**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.069

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q. M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.69. This is Regina Forsythe, I am interviewing Dr .Madison Dill. The interview is being conducted in the home of Dr. Dill located at 1303 Monticello Court, Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The tape of this interview along with a transcription of the interview will become part of the Quintin Miller Smith Collection and will be available to the public. Future researchers may include portions of this interview in their publications. Is that all right with you Dr. Dill?

DILL: Yes

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

DILL: J. Madison Dill, when I was in service throughout the war I went by Jesse M. Dill so when I got out I decided I wouldn't go by that any more. I was going to change it the other way.

FORSYTHE: What is your birth date and place of birth?

DILL: 11/11/17 Murfreesboro.

FORSYTHE: Your father's name and occupation?

DILL: James Sobey, he was a postal employee.

FORSYTHE: Your mother's name and occupation.

DILL: Her name was Sarah Elizabeth Brashear, she worked for the post office also after my father past away, but until she hadn't worked.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

DILL: I had one brother, James Scobey Jr. and I have a sister who is deceased, Thelma Dill.

FORSYTHE: Your wife's name?

DILL: Charlotte Ezell Dill

FORSYTHE: Do you have any children?

DILL: Two daughters, the older one is names Charlotte Elizabeth, and the younger one is Barbara Read.

FORSYTHE: Did anyone else in your family go to MTSU?

DILL: Our daughters did for a couple of years each, and my brother did.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose to go to MTSU?

DILL: Well, of course it was a local college, I lived on Bell street which was in walking distance, that was not a problem, and it never occured to me to go anywhere else.

FORSYTHE: What years where you in school.

DILL: I was there from 1936 to 1940, I graduated in the class of '40.

FORSYTHE: What was your major?

DILL: Music

FORSYTHE: Why did you study music?

DILL: Because I took up playing a trumpet when I was young and I just kept on and I decided I would become a band director, so when I finished here I did, two years before I had to go into the Navy. Once I got into the Navy I got away from music, I went into the naval air corps, and was a pilot in the navy, so I didn't do anything in music.

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have of going to school at MTSU?

DILL: Well I have a lot of fond memories. Of course being here I didn't have to stay in a dormitory, so I didn't have to stay in a dorm. I was active in the campus, in the music department especially, and in the band and the orchestra and the men's glee club.

FORSYTHE: What was registration like?

DILL: It was much simpler than it is now, there wasn't much to is, in a few minutes we were signed up and ready to go. Now it takes days.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me about the glee club?

DILL: Miss E May Saunders was the director back in those days, she was one of the few music instructors we had, and she directed the glee club and the orchestra part of the time. We had a men's glee club and it wasn't nearly as big as the one they

have now, but we enjoyed it. I was really more active throughout the year with the band. I started playing in the band a year before I went to school there, then when I started to school there, I continued to be a member of the band.

FORSYTHE: Is this the marching band?

DILL: Marching and concert.

FORSYTHE: How did you get to be a part of the band before you were a student?

DILL: Well I suppose I had enough experience playing and they needed musicians, there were a few of us who played with the band while we were still in high school and also played with the Middle Tennessee University Band. Dr. Mebane, whose name you might have come across some where along the line, was a physics teacher and in about 1932 he was given the job as band director, because Dr. Lyon, who was president at that time found out that Dr. Mebane had done some playing when he was in school, so he asked him if he would take over the band. The band was just a beginning band, it had been organized just two or three years before that but it hadn't done very much, so Dr. Mebane took the band over and was the band director for a couple of years. Then when I was going to school we had a fine old man who was a Spaniard, Mr. Gabriele Valdez, and he was a fine musician and he turned the band around and made it a lot better than it had been.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about the first flight school, you said you were a part of that.

DILL: That is interesting. Shortly after we graduated in 1940, I received a telephone call one day from Dr. Smith, and he asked me if I would like to be a part of an experimental class in flying, I jumped at the chance to do that. He said they were organizing this thing they called the CPT, Civilian Pilot Training program and they were putting this in a lot of the universities and colleges throughout the country to give interested men, and ladies I guess, a chance to take this course as a fore step to going into the service. So in our class we had sixteen people, some from our class that had just graduated, like my self, I think they picked students that had already graduated because they thought they had more maturity and wanted to see how the class would be operated and we started flying out at old Sky Harbor air port which is in an air port out about seven miles in Florence and it was the first large airport in middle Tennessee, at that time it had already gone down quite a bit because Berry Field had been built in Nashville and most of the flying coming into this area went into Berry Field. But we started flying down there and flew for a couple of weeks, then we transferred down to Berry Field in Nashville, and we finished there but the classes from then on, they built a run way at the university where some of the dormitories are now, some of the new family dormitories they have built, where the old barn was for the university, we had a runway running south from that. The classes after ours had their training there until they built the airport out on the Lebanon road which was long after that time, I have forgotten when that was built but I guess I was away when it was built, but

now it is the main thing here now. Of course the aerospace program is big here now and recognized all over the country and also through the world because we have had a lot of pilots come here to be trained in commercial aviation and things. But it was interesting that Mr. Smith called us and asked if we would take part in that and we were all glad that we did, I think most of them got through that course and went into one of the air services either the army or the navy or the marines during the war, so that is why we did all this in aviation.

FORSYTHE: How long were the courses?

DILL: It probably took three months for the primary training that we had.

FORSYTHE: Was it just flight training?

DILL: Flight and ground training, because then we had to pass the regular CAA test in flight and in ground school to get out private pilots license, which we did and then shortly after that almost all of us had gone into the service and as I said almost everybody except one person went into some phase of aviation and service, either the army or the navy or the marines.

FORSYTHE: Who was your teacher?

DILL: Well there were pilots who came from somewhere else, I think the ones that came here on of them lived in Nashville, I think he still lives there. We had a reunion of our class about ten years ago, and most everybody who was in the class came back to it, and one of our instructors was also here at that time, I think he lived in Nashville. But I forget where the other man was from, he was a certified instructor, both of them were to carry on the school.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about Dean Beasley.

DILL: You want to see the pictures to as we talk about them?

FORSYTHE: Sure.

DILL: Here is the 1940 annual, there is Dr. Golightly. He taught psychology, he was a fine old gentleman, a good teacher. Here is a picture of Dr. Smith and Dean Beasley in front of Old Main, there is a picture of Dr. Smith at his desk.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Dr. Smith?

DILL: Well, I don't remember to much about him. Charlotte can tell you a little more about him being from Cookeville but he had been in World War I and had a slight speech defect that affected his speech, but it never phased him from making a speech or carrying on his duties. But he came while we were in our junior year, and as a new comer to the campus, a lot of students wanted to make something

bad out of it, they would give him a hard time. But he was a fine man, he was a good administrator and as I said he had service in World War I and I have forgotten now when he retired,

FORSYTHE: 1958

DILL: Then I have forgotten when he died.

FORSYTHE: '76.

DILL: There is another picture there of Dr. Beasley. He was a Murfreesboro man, he lived out on Lebanon road, not too far away, he was a likable chap, we liked both of them.

FORSYTHE: What about Mr. Bayer?

DILL: He is the man up there on the top. He was in charge of the agricultural things, the farm and so forth and I remember they used to have fields of berries in the spring time that they planted and you could go and pick berries and pay a very minimum amount for the berries that you picked.

FORSYTHE: Mr. Green

DILL: He was in the maintenance department he was a carpenter. He had a son who was a very good tennis player. Then Mr. Hastings, I knew him because he went to church at the East Main street Church of Christ, he was one of the engineers in the boiler and heating department. Mr. Holmes was the bursar, of course he handled all the money and we didn't have much to do with him. Miss McHenry was his secretary, she was president to the president I mean. Marie Engles was secretary to the Dean. She was a fine lady, she was not much older than the rest of us, we all enjoyed being with her. This is Miss Margie Mitchell who was in charge of the dormitories, the ladies and Miss Murfree was the librarian. Lorene Neece was the cafeterian. In those days some of the students worked there way through school by working in the cafeteria and some of us who had friends who worked there got free meals.

FORSYTHE: Did you have a job when you were a student?

DILL: No except for just a small job in the music department trying to keep track of all the instruments and music and things like that. I was the student director the last two years there. When I started I received a small sum but after that I didn't receive any money any more because it wasn't all that expensive.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Miss Murfree, the librarian.

DILL: I don't remember much about her but not because I didn't go to the library. I don't know if you have run across the name Joe Netherland, but Joe was a student. Joe tells the story that when he was going to graduate, he was a class ahead of me, Dr. Smith called him in the morning of the graduation and said he wanted to show Joe something, so they walked over the library and he said "Joe this is the library, I don't think you are familiar with this building." Joe was a cheerleader and turned out to be an excellent insurance man, he sold insurance while he was going to school. . . . Ollie Green taught chemistry and between Miss Green and some of the students we almost blew up the lab every once in a while. Miss Mary Hall was in education, she was a fine teacher. She worked with the state for many years, she always was a real nice person, she had a good sense of humor, in her later years she decided to take a course in belly dancing, she said she enjoyed it, it gave her some good exercise. . . . Mr. Jones was in mathematics and if it hadn't been for Mr. Jones when I first decided to go into the navy, in order for me to go in I had to have one quarter of trigonometry which I had not had and I called Mr. Jones and he volunteered to meet with me one on one to go through the fundamentals of trigonometry to get me where I could pass the entrance test. I liked him very well. . . . All of these people, we liked all of them. . . . Mr. Wheeler, I had forgotten that he was on the faculty but he was the architect for several of the buildings out there, I am not sure which ones. Then from here on we get into some of our class things. Here is John Bragg he was the president of our student body the last year I was there. John and I were close friends and still are, we went to school together practically all of our life, he came from Woodbury to Murfreesboro when he was in the 5th grade and we were in the training school at that time. Then all through high school and then all through the university. We were the second class to have a student body president, the first class was the one before us and that is when this was all organized and Charley Miller was the president of the student body in the class proceeding ours, but when they came for the election in our class, John and I tied in votes for the president of the student body, so we had to have a run off, and John edged me out by two or three votes, so he became the president of the student body. Then I became the president of the senior class.

FORSYTHE: What was the difference between the Associated Student Body and the president of the senior class?

DILL: Well each class had its own president and officers and that had nothing to do with the over all thing of the student body president, but the officers of the classes weren't to busy. But quite a bit of time and effort was put into those. There is a picture of the congress of 1940, and I knew most all of those and this is the supreme court and what they did I don't know. But this was a real good friend of mine, Sam Smith who died two or three years ago. All of our lives, just like John, Sam and I were friends all through school.

FORSYTHE: As president of the senior class, what did you do?

DILL: I don't remember that I did a whole lot, I think I was more of a figure head than anything else. But I think I was called to discuss a few things with somebody when it needed to be done, some of our students went over board in some way but it was no trouble. So as I say, Dr. Smith's daughter was in nursing school along with our daughter and Dr. Smith's son we knew real well to, I thought he was a fine man and a great scholar. I know he was an efficient administrator because he had done this at Tennessee Tech and I don't know where he had been before then, he went to school here, he was in one of the first classes around 1911 or '12.

FORSYTHE: Yes we have some of his class notes, you ought to come see them, they are so detailed.

DILL: When was it?

FORSYTHE: 1911, when the school opened and he graduated in 1913. What do you remember about PA Lyon?

DILL: I don't remember Dr. Lyon to well. Of course he had been the president I don't know how many years when I was in school but he was a fine administrator. Dr. Jones was his son-in-law, I believe Dr. Lyon daughter married Dr. Jones as I was telling you about, who was the mathematics teacher. I think before Dr. Lyon, there might have been a Jones who was a president, was there?

FORSYTHE: Yes, Horace Jones' father, R. L. Jones. What condition were the buildings in when you were here?

DILL: What few there were. They were in good condition but of course back in those days we only had one dormitory for boys, Jones Hall was the only boys dormitory we had, then they had the two girls dormitories, what were there names?

FORSYTHE: Rutledge and Lyon

DILL: Those two were there for the girls, and that is the only two girls dormitories we had. Many of these buildings, we only had, [reading from a map] Old Main and Rutledge, and was Lyon Hall was right down in front of it a little bit, Jones Hall was right in this area, the science building was built when I was there, next to Jones Hall. I believe it was next to it, somewhere in that area. The old football field used to be right in here, where they played football years ago, let's see, this is Baird Lane, that air strip, what building is that?

FORSYTHE: The Keathley University Center

DILL: Yes and just a little further this way was where the Old Barn used to be, before they built all of those dormitories in there, so that air strip went down this way to about right here where the dairy barn used to be. Number 22 is where the new building is now.

FORSYTHE: Right that would have been in the middle of the air strip.

DILL: But things have certainly changed. I will tell you another thing or two. When we were in school they only had just a few faculty automobiles. We never had any trouble with parking, because mostly we had bicycles or people walked, and the faculty didn't have very many cars. The first automobile that the students had that we can remember was one that coach Murphy got when he was in school. He and somebody else paid fifteen dollars for a model T Ford. [see Charles and Leona Murphy transcript QMS.1995.42-44] They found it in Nashville or somewhere and they named it "Little Audrey" It was the only student car you would see on the campus. As I say very few faculty cars were on campus, so things have certainly changed.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about coach Murphy as a student.

DILL: I have know him ever since he was in school and we have been good friends all of our lives, his wife was in our class, and I guess he is probably the best athlete we have ever had out there, as an all around athlete. He was very easily a professional baseball player because he would have gone into that if it had not been for the war. He spent his career in the navy, in physical education for the navy, coaching baseball teams and that sort of thing. When he came back in 1948 or '49 to coach football and he was the outstanding coach that we have had all through the years, no other coach has approached him from a standpoint of number of titles won and so forth and having good ball teams, just a fine fellow.