

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
HAROLD BEASLEY

5 OCTOBER 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.118

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
HAROLD BEASLEY**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.118

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q. M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.118. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Harold BEASLEY:. Today is Thursday, October 5, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Colonel BEASLEY:, located at 1815 Avon Drive, in Murfreesboro Tennessee. The tape of this interview along with a transcription of the interview will become a 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 Colonel BEASLEY:?

BEASLEY: Yes.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

BEASLEY: Harold Lafayette Beasley.

FORSYTHE: Your birth date?

BEASLEY: November 12, 1928.

FORSYTHE: Your birthplace?

BEASLEY: Christiana.

FORSYTHE: Your father's name?

BEASLEY: Elmo Beasley.

FORSYTHE: His occupation?

BEASLEY: He was an operator with the railroad. He managed the depot, sold tickets, shipped the freight.

FORSYTHE: Your mother's name?

BEASLEY: Roberta Miller Beasley.

FORSYTHE: Her occupation?

BEASLEY: She was a housewife.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

BEASLEY: No.

FORSYTHE: What is your wife's name?

BEASLEY: Love Woodfin.

FORSYTHE: What is her occupation?

BEASLEY: Well, she's been a housewife too. When I was in Vietnam she went back to MTSU and took courses in ceramics, in art. Later she went into weaving wall hangings, we have several at the house.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any children?

BEASLEY: Yes, I have three boys: Robert, William, and Harold.

FORSYTHE: Did they go to MTSU?

BEASLEY: William graduated from MTSU. Harold graduated from MTSU. Robert went to Georgia Southern since we lived down in Georgia and then went to the University of Georgia.

FORSYTHE: Tell me again what you were telling me before about the aviation classes.

BEASLEY:: The Tennessee Aeronautics Commission gave twenty scholarships in aviation in 1946. This consisted of aviation courses and ten hours of flying time. Since I wanted to fly, I signed up, and was lucky to get one of the scholarships. I soloed in December 1946.

FORSYTHE: Tell me how those scholarships were awarded?

BEASLEY: They said the seniors get first choice, then the juniors, and on down to freshmen; so I lucked out, I guess.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about the top floor of Old Main.

BEASLEY: The top floor of Old Main used to have a link trainer. This was set up like an airplane. It covered your head and you would learn to fly instrument flying. That was left over from World War II when they used to have pilot training at MTSU.

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have of being a student at MTSU?

BEASLEY: I was a day student. I lived at home and drove from Christiana into school everyday. So I didn't get to participate in a lot of activities. But I had some good teachers and some I didn't think too much of.

FORSYTHE: Tell me more about the aviation program.

BEASLEY: Dean Beasley's son was Bill Beasley. He had come back from World War II and he was working on his masters degree. He taught aviation classes since he had been a navigator/bombardier in World War II. I took all the classes that he taught. Of course we had an airport out on the farm, past where dormitories are now. We would walk out to the airport and go flying.

FORSYTHE: Did the flight pattern ever bother the students, the planes coming and going?

BEASLEY: No, because we would take off to the south and fly to the east and when we came in we wouldn't get over the populated area.

FORSYTHE: Was there a military program here then?

BEASLEY: Yes, there was during the world war, and I was too young for it. When I was starting school, there was another guy who was in the Navy V-12 program. This is where the Navy sent people to school to get two years college and learn some more about aviation training. That guy left and I lost track of him. I ran into this guy in Iceland in June of 1953. He had gone ahead and finished and had gotten his navy wings. He was passing though the same time I was on a flight to Europe.

FORSYTHE: Was there an ROTC program here?

BEASLEY: Not at that time. I left in 1949 into the Air Force and it wasn't in existence at that time. I came back in 1957 and finished college and the Army ROTC had been started, so I don't know exactly the date it started.

FORSYTHE: What years did you go to school here?

BEASLEY: '46, '47, '48, and '49 and then I came back in January of '57. I finished in May of '57. When I came back I was on a program called "Operation Bootstrap." The Air Force would let you have a leave of absence to go to college if you could finish college in six months. I had flown up here, and went into to see Dean Beasley. He wrote me a letter saying I could finish and get a degree within the time allotted. I took that letter and submitted it through Air Force channels and was approved. I had to pay for all my moving up here, buying my books, tuition, and everything. When I finished up, I went back to my regular Air Force station.

FORSYTHE: What was your major and minor?

BEASLEY: I majored in mathematics. I guess industrial arts would be my minor.

FORSYTHE: Why did you go to school at MTSU.

BEASLEY: Well that was the closest college from where I lived.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember going to chapel?

BEASLEY: We used to have chapel in the auditorium.

FORSYTHE: What did you do for fun?

BEASLEY: I got to fly, meet some other guys, and talk about aviation. Then I'd go home and study and get ready for the next day. That's about it.

FORSYTHE: Where was the Aviation department then?

BEASLEY: Well they didn't have an Aviation department as they do today, but they had the program and they had the courses. Bill Beasley is about the only guy that was teaching. The other guys would teach flying out at the airport. Miller Lanier was one of them. Bill Miller was another one. In some of the yearbooks there is an aviation club.

FORSYTHE: Did you belong to that?

BEASLEY: Well, I went to one of the picnics we had up at Rock Island State Park. Most of the time they met at night and I wasn't able to come to those meetings.

FORSYTHE: Tell me what you remember about Bill Beasley.

BEASLEY: Well he knew how to teach navigation and meteorology and I learned a lot in that respect. I guess he was working on his master's degree too, so I didn't see him much except just in class.

FORSYTHE: Miller Lanier.

BEASLEY: He was real good. He'd get you up in an airplane, he was so easy and smooth, it was easy to learn to fly.

FORSYTHE: Bill Miller.

BEASLEY: Bill Miller was my first cousin. He flew in World War II. I guess it was from him I wanted to learn to fly. But in training, I never did fly with him. He went to school here for a year or so, and then he went to Vanderbilt University and got a degree in nuclear physics.

FORSYTHE: Richard McCord, he was a math professor.

BEASLEY: No, I don't remember him. R.E. Jones was the math professor. He was great. He could write a problem on the blackboard and go write on down and write the answer. He could give you the problem number, the page, and the book it was in. Another one in the Math department was Miss Ollie Green. I didn't have too many courses under her. Most of my classes were under Mr. Jones.

FORSYTHE: Dean Beasley.

BEASLEY: He was very good. Dean Beasley is not kin to me. You could go in and talk to him and he was very helpful.

FORSYTHE: Robert Ridon

BEASLEY: He knew biology. I took a year of biology under him. Another teacher I had was Dr. Ed Baldwin, he taught geography. I will never forget his definition of geography - "Geography is the study of man's adjustment to his natural environment." I had Mr. Evins for English. I didn't write to please him. Mr. Otis Freeman, I had three years of drawing under him. He was a real good teacher. The other math teacher was Tommie Reynolds. She was good too. Neil Wright and his wife, I remember them. Dr. Peck was an English teacher and his wife also.

FORSYTHE: Q.M. Smith.

BEASLEY: I didn't see the president a lot. I saw more of Dean Beasley than I did Mr. Smith.

FORSYTHE: Catherine Clark.

BEASLEY: I would see her in the library. I would see Buleah Davis over in the gym. We all had to take some physical education. One of the courses I took was folk dancing. Joe Gibson was a student too, and he was a Navy pilot during World War II. He flew some out at the airport. They built a new gym and during the summertime I worked on that construction site as a water boy, carrying water to all the workers. Russ Faulkinberry was a big football player at Vanderbilt University. He worked there too during the summer. He carried steel for the steel people.

FORSYTHE: What other jobs did you have.

BEASLEY: I worked as a carpenter helper in building some houses around Murfreesboro, putting roofs on houses. On weekends I would help at Miller's grocery store in Christiana. He was my uncle.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me what the hanger looked like on the inside?

BEASLEY: They could get a half dozen planes or more in there. It depended on how they put them in. If the weather was going to be good they would just tie them down outside.

The shed to the side was where you would meet your instructor. They had a schedule listing what instructor is going to fly with what pilot and for how long.

FORSYTHE: Is there anything else you want to tell me about?

BEASLEY: When I came back in '57, I was going to school and I flew with the air national guard. I did that to stay proficient. I started to school in '57 and in November and December of '56 I had been in Alaska. I believe Miss Green was a geography teacher at that time. We were studying Russia and talking about the islands near Alaska. I told her last month I was looking at those islands. I told her about being in Alaska. When I came back these are some of the courses I had to take to get my degree. There were two electrical engineering courses that I had to take under a teacher named John Wade. I remember the girls in the office saying that I would have a hard time. I went in there and did my work and I didn't think he was a hard instructor. I passed with no problem at all. In 1962 the Air Force sent me to the University of Oklahoma to get an electrical engineering degree.