

INTERVIEWEE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: Milburn E. (Jack) Bowlin M/F: M

Address: 3320 Armstrong Rd., Cedar Bluff, AL 35959

Phone number(s): (205) 779-6918

Approximate age or date of birth: 5-31-31 / 65 yrs old

Mothersname: Elizabeth Davis

Father's name: Milburn (Bud) E. Bowlin

Places lived and when: Lansing, Michigan until 18 mos. old; moved to Nashville, TN until 1984; moved to Cedar Bluff, AL (presently)

Education: elementary/junior high school in Nashville, TN

Texas A.+M. Polygraph Institute

Religion: raised Baptist / now non-denominational

Business, political and social memberships (past and present): Civitan Club, Kiwanis Club, Police Chiefs of America, L.E.I.U. (Law Enforcement Intelligence Units), Tennessee Law Enforcement Officers Association

Present occupation: Retired - does occasional woodworking jobs

Former occupations: Major, Metropolitan Nashville (TN) Police Department

Special Skills: Head of Internal Affairs, Began Training Academy

Major Accomplishments: Operated own Polygraph business

National Events in which interviewee has participated: Appeared on TV show "That's Incredible" with police TAZAR Gun - 1<sup>st</sup> police dept in U.S. to have "stun" gun

Local Events in which interviewee has participated: Speeches to various organizations, including student bodies at various high schools

National born U.S. citizen?  Yes /  No Naturalized Citizen: Yes /  No

Country from which he/she emigrated: N/A

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in the possession of the interviewee: assorted photographs, certificates, etc. from law enforcement career

Individuals recommended by the interviewee who might be candidates for an oral history interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information: 1<sup>st</sup> police officer to graduate from U.S. Treasury Dept. Narcotics School (Washington, D.C.)

Gift and Release Agreement

We Jack Bowlin and Jean Bowlin  
Interviewee (print) Interviewer (print)

do hereby give and grant Jacksonville State University, Oral History Archive, all literary and property rights, title, and interest which we may possess to the audio or video recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) conducted at

3320 Armstrong Rd, Cedar Bluff, AL 35959

on the date(s) of April 6, 1996

for the oral history collection being compiled by Dr. Marshall.

Jack Bowlin  
Interviewee's Signature

Date: 4-6-96

Address 3320 Armstrong Rd

Cedar Bluff, AL 35959

Phone (205) 779-6918

Jean A. Bowlin  
Interviewer's Signature

Date 4-6-96

Address 3320 Armstrong Rd

Cedar Bluff, AL 35959

Phone (205) 779-6918

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

by

JEAN POSEY BOWLIN

with

MAJOR JACK BOWLIN

on

April 6, 1996

Oral History Interview  
with Major Jack Bowlin

On April 6, 1996, I conducted an interview to be catalogued in the Oral History Archives of Jacksonville State University. The interview was with police Major Jack Bowlin, retired from the Metropolitan Nashville (TN) Police Department. Major Bowlin retired from the police force in 1984 after 27 years of service to the Nashville community.

Prior to actually conducting the interview with Major Bowlin, I had prepared a list of questions which I felt would cover his career in depth as well as make an interesting interview. I presented the topic and list of questions to Major Bowlin who then reviewed the proposed topic and questions before our scheduled interview time.

The interview began with my brief introduction of Major Bowlin and my request for him to tell about his life.

As the interview progressed, I realized that Major Bowlin was well prepared to cover the proposed topic and questions and was also very animated in relating his many interesting experiences. I felt that to interrupt the flow of conversation would prove to be detrimental rather than beneficial to the interview. I chose to have the interview become a monologue rather than a dialogue.

The focus of the interview was how Major Bowlin became a police officer; his rise through the ranks from patrolman to investigator to detective to Head of Internal Affairs to Head of the Homicide Division to Director of Training to organizer of the Law Enforcement Training Academy and the succession through the ranks which accompanied his increased responsibility. The interview contains many first person accounts of life on the streets as a police officer in the 1960's and 1970's. This period of time reflects an overall change in the structure of the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department and Major Bowlin's direct involvement in that change. The interview highlights criminal activity by police officers, general crime in the city, and the racial and social turmoil of the late 1960's.

Major Bowlin begins by talking about his youth and about dropping out of school in the ninth grade. After a series of odd jobs, he realized that his lifelong ambition to be a police officer was still on his mind. "By the time I was old enough to be a police officer, I realized I had made a serious mistake in dropping out of school", said Major Bowlin when relating how he studied and tried to educate himself to prepare to take the test for the Davidson County Sheriff's Patrol. He succeeded in passing the test (he was 13th out of 40 applicants tested) in July, 1959, at the age of 28 years old.

"... to become a police officer had been a childhood dream of mine" said Major Bowlin when talking about being hired as a patrolman.

Major Bowlin mentioned the city police and county sheriff's patrol as being corrupt and lacking in leadership. It becomes evident that he decided early in his career to become a leader on the police force. He discussed how difficult it was to make ends meet financially in trying to raise his family of a wife and five children on a patrolman's salary. His family obligation was a definite incentive to rise through the ranks, prompting him to seek advancement through self-study.

Looking at the historical perspective, the early 1960's was a time of change in the Nashville city/county government. Many large cities across the United States were adopting a "Metropolitan" form of government, combining city and county agencies into one body. This merger took place in 1963. Society was changing as Southern cities were growing: there was more widespread crime and the type of criminal activity previously found only in larger northern cities like Chicago and New York was making its way south.

One of the criminal aspects of society to reach Nashville was the growing incidences of police corruption throughout the force. Major Bowlin played an integral part as Head of Internal Affairs to crack down on illegal

activities by police officers. He was responsible for numerous patrolmen as well as supervisory personnel being indicted and eventually sent to prison. He worked closely with the Federal Bureau of Investigation to identify and monitor subversive activity by various groups. Major Bowlin relates how the use of wire tapping by the police force was common and admits that these tactics were illegal.

Several of the events that are memorable are told in such a detailed fashion that the listener can envision exactly what happened, almost as if the interview is visual as well as audio.

There are and have been so many police - action television shows and movies where the viewer sees these scripted actors in investigations that seem impossible to really have happened. Major Bowlin's first person accounts of investigating criminals certainly are vivid in helping the listener gain a better understanding and appreciation of how the police department really operates.

As the chronology of the interview progressed into the late 1960's and Major Bowlin discusses the riots and racial turmoil in the city of Nashville, the listener is reminded of the civil rights movement that was going on nationwide. The riots in 1967 and 1968 followed years of racial strife predominately in the South. Again, Major Bowlin's vivid description of the

events during the Nashville riots was an "Audio Newsreel"

Major Bowlin takes great pride in his involvement in the upgrading of the police training facility. He was instrumental in obtaining the federal grant to build a new facility for properly and effectively training police recruits. "We became one of the best police academies in the country ", said Major Bowlin as he described the development of the nine month training academy as being one of the highlights of his career. He received the rank of Major during this time.

The lowest point of Major Bowlin's career was in August, 1982, when his son, Officer William Bowlin, a five-year veteran of the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department, was shot and killed as he answered a call involving a domestic dispute. Major Bowlin shows his integrity during the references to his son.

Major Bowlin takes great pride in his service to the community. He lectured to a class of recruits at the academy where he told them "They would never be a good police officer until they realized that they were really only public servants."

The job that a police officer does every day is usually a thankless task; he is often taken for granted in his relentless protection of the community and in his pursuit of justice.

Major Bowlin relates the commitment that is necessary

to become and to remain a good police officer. He refers to strong character traits such as leadership which are necessary to overcome the daily pitfalls of the job and of the determination necessary to overcome society's often negative opinion of police officers.

Major Bowlin's endorsement of law enforcement as a career choice for young people is an encouraging word about modern police forces. He is emphatic about being committed to the job and really having a desire to contribute to the community as well as to all of humanity.

Major Jack Bowlin is a shining example of what a truly dedicated police officer should be. From his humble beginnings as a patrolman on the Sheriff's Patrol to his achievements at the rank of major on the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department, his 27 years' service in law enforcement made a positive impact on the overall credibility as well as definitive effectiveness of the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department.

*ind job 7  
95*

*more like  
him*

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
with Major Jack Bowlin

Names of persons mentioned in context of interview:

Elizabeth and Bud Bowlin, parents

Joann (Jody) Bowlin, wife

Sheriff Tom Cartwright

Chief Hubert Kemp

Mayor Beverly Briley

Officer William (Billy) Bowlin, son