

JIMMY DALE BOOZER, AN ORAL HISTORY.
J. Adam Boozer

History 444

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Gift and Release Agreement:

We Jimmy Dale Boozer and Adam Boozer
(Interviewee) (Interviewer)

Do hereby grant permission to Jacksonville State University to copy the tape of the interview conducted at Jimmy Boozer's Home on the date(s) of 11-4-95 for the oral history collection being compiled at Jacksonville State University.

This collection will be maintained by Jacksonville State University for research into the history of Northeast Alabama and the South. We further grant researchers permission to quote from the interview on this tape.

Jimmy Dale Boozer
(Interviewee's signature)

Date 11-4-95

257 Rabbit Run Road
(Address)

Rainsville, AL. 35986

(205) 638-7606
(Telephone)

Adam Boozer
(Interviewer's signature)

Date 11-4-95

178 County Road 649
(Address)

Mentone AL, 35964

(Telephone)

Interviewee Background Information

Name: Jimmy Dale Boozer
Address: 257 Rabbit Run Road RAINSVILLE AL. 35986
Phone Number(s): (205) 638-7606
Approximate age or date of birth: 2-1-49 (46)
Mother's name: OPAL BOOZER
Father's name: NOLAN BOOZER
Places lived and when: Tenn. 1949, Rt. 1 Section ALA Late 1949 thru - 1971, 1971-1972 Scottsboro AL, 1972-1989 Rt. 1 Section, Ala. 1989 - Present RAINSVILLE, AL.
Education: ASSOCIATE APPLIED SCIENCE, NORTH EAST State Community College
Religion: FREE HOLINESS
Business, political and social memberships (past and present): NONE

Present occupation: Waste Water Treatment Plant Operator (Trainee)
Former occupation(s): 10 yrs. Textile, 14 yrs. Nuclear Plant Construction.
Special skills: Wood-working
Major Accomplishments: Raised two children, bought + Paid for a home.

Local events in which you have participated: NONE

State and/or regional events in which you have participated: NONE

National events in which you have participated: NONE

International events in which you have participated: NONE

Natural born U.S. citizen? Yes/No
Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: _____
Country from which you emigrated: _____
Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in your possession: Indian Artifacts + Pictures

Individuals you recommend who might be candidates for an oral history interview: _____

Additional information: _____

LIST OF QUESTIONS

1. When and where were you born?
2. When did you come to Alabama?
3. Where did you live?
4. Did your family always live in the same area?
5. Where and when did you begin school?
6. Where did you go to high school?
7. What type of work did your family do?
8. When did you begin working?
9. What type of work did you do?
10. Do you remember how much you got paid for picking cotton?
11. What did you do with your money?
12. When did people stop growing cotton in this area?
13. Why do you think people stopped growing cotton?
14. At what time during the year did cotton picking begin?
15. What year did you graduate from high school?
16. What was your first job after graduation?
17. Were you afraid of being drafted?
18. Were there many people from this area that got drafted, or were you the only one?
19. Where were you sent after you finished basic training?
20. Is there anything that really stands out from your tour in Korea?
21. Did you have a lot of contact with your family?
22. Did they seem worried about you?
23. When did you come home from Korea?
24. Upon your return, did you come back to Macedonia?

25. Were there ever any black people in this area?
26. Did you have any contact with them at all while you were growing up?
27. Did you know about Governor Wallace's actions at the University of Alabama?
28. What was the opinion of the community upon hearing about this?
29. What was the feeling of the community when Kennedy was assassinated?
30. Why didn't people in your community like Kennedy?
31. When you came home from the army where did you work?
32. How long did you work there.
33. Were you married?
34. Did you have children?
35. What was your next job?
36. Where is the Bellefonte Nuclear plant located?
37. Did you become frustrated with TVA?
38. Up to this point, would you say that you have had a good life?

TAPE TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Birth, Birth place, When the Boozers moved to Alabama....
2. Cotton farming, hoeing, picking, stories...
3. Stories and experiences in the cotton field and elsewhere...
4. Jobs, from the first one till the present day...
5. Military experiences, military life, a different culture...
6. Jobs after the military...
7. Marriage, children...
8. TVA, jobs thoughts, experiences...
9. Creedence Clearwater Revival-"Cotton Fields"...

JIMMY DALE BOOZER, AN ORAL HISTORY.

Jimmy Dale Boozer was born on February 1, 1949, in Red Bank Tennessee. Three months later his family moved to a small community in rural north Alabama called Macedonia. This is where it all began. Most people in Macedonia were poor, except for a few, who were the landowners. Most of the people hired out to do farm work for the landowners. Opal and Nolan Boozer were Jimmy Dale's parents and this is what they did.

The community of Macedonia was located on Sand Mountain. It was the typical small southern community, one in which everyone knew everyone else. The Boozers were no different from any other poor southern family, they had very little, and they had to work hard for what they did have.

In Alabama in 1949, if you were a farmer, most likely you grew cotton. Cotton was the backbone of Alabama's agricultural economy, and had been for many years. Cotton was very prominent on Sand Mountain, and in and around Macedonia. Many southern families knew what it was liked to not have much, to have little to eat, to have no cars and to have cracks in the floor with chickens running back and forth underneath their houses. Most of them could distinguish between themselves and the people that they saw when they went into the city.¹

During the fifties and the early part of Jimmy Dale's life, he began learning a great deal about something that would leave him with many memories and leave a lasting impression on the rest of his life. This was Cotton, he began picking cotton at age five. the smaller children were given a small pick sack or a toe sack with a homemade strap so it would be easier for them to carry. They were to walk along with their mothers and pick as

¹Williamson, Michael, Maharidge, Dale. And Their Children After Them. pp. 75-77. Pantheon books. New York, 1990.

much as they could. Jimmy Dale tells one interesting story about how he would get a pretty good bit ahead of his mother and instead of walking all the way back to his mother he would just find the nearest adult and empty his sack into theirs. If his mother had known this she would have probably been very upset, but he was pretty good at not getting caught. The younger children were not allowed to hoe because the landowners feared that they would mistake the cotton for weeds, and cut down the wrong thing. Children were given time off from school in both the spring, for planting and chopping and in the fall, for picking. Jimmy Dale eventually graduated from only picking and was given the opportunity to hoe. He has many good cotton picking stories, one of the best is about him and his cousin. One morning Jimmy Dale got up early and beat everyone else to the field and picked a sack of cotton before anyone got there. He and his cousin always had a contest to see who could pick the most cotton in a day. He and his cousin were walking home and Jim thought that he had won. After he went home his cousin doubled back a mile and a half out of his way just to pick one more sack of cotton and win the contest for the day. This reflects the competitive nature of most Alabamians.

Times were rough while Jimmy Dale and his family while they were working in the fields. The landowners rarely had a truck for every field so many times they would just drop off a wagon, and pick it up later in the day. The pickers weighed every sack of cotton that they picked and then dumped it onto the wagon. Most of the time they used crude scales that were not entirely accurate. Jimmy Dale says that he felt he could hold his own among the fastest of the pickers, but his real art was hoeing. He first began hoeing cotton at age ten. He quickly became, what some might call a natural, many people that had seen him work acknowledged him as being the fastest around. In the field he would get what he called "half a round". ahead of everyone else and he would prop up on his hoe and wait until they almost caught up and then he would take off again.

He could not remember exactly how much they got paid, but he did say that hoers typically got paid by the hour, or by the day and pickers, by how much they picked. He said that a fast picker could make more than anyone else. He did remember what they did with their money. First of all, they had to buy their shoes and their school clothes, they rarely had any money left over, but if they did, they got to spend it as they wanted to. Jimmy tells a story of how he got a neighbor , who had a truck, to take him down to the town of Fyffe, where there was a Western Auto store. Here he bought a western Flyer bicycle. The neighbor hauled it home for him, and he rode it until it was completely worn out. This proves that someone who never has much tends to appreciate things more, especially new things. Jimmy Dale had saved his money for that bike and he was determined to make the best of his investment. This is something that really means something to him and is something that has stuck with him through the years. He spoke of carrying lunch and perhaps a jar of icewater to the fields when they left from home in the mornings. Occasionally, a nice person might come along and give them a cold drink. Jimmy Dale told a story of how they had a neighbor that would come in a big truck and pick them up from the field. Before they got into the back of the truck they would each gather some may pops and when they passed a sign they would throw them and hit the sign. this would scare the wits out of the lady that was driving the truck. This was just one of many games that they played. It seems that perhaps this gave them an outlet to forget about the rough times and try to make the best of the situation.

In the mid to late sixties cotton began to disappear on Sand Mountain, as it did throughout the rest of the state, and the rest of the south. Manual labor was no longer needed, as the mechanical cotton picker was seen commonly throughout the south. Herbicides also made manual labor obsolete. Cotton prices fell and many farmers realized

that they could make more money by growing other crops. "King Cotton", as it had been called in the past, had been de-throned. What was once the backbone of Alabama's economy had faded out of sight. Jimmy Dale said that he had always threatened to plant a few rows of cotton and make his kids hoe and pick it, just so they could say that they had done it. To him this is just one of those things that everybody should be required to do at least once in their life

Jimmy Dale began elementary school in 1955, at Macedonia Junior High School. He attended School here through the ninth grade. From here he went to Section High School. He graduated from Section High School in 1967. As he grew up in the sixties, he saw many things happen to the nation as a whole and also many things happened right here in Alabama that would have a lasting effect on the entire country. In the fifties a rising black leader had emerged, his name was Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. He believed in massive but peaceful protest. He was the leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Coalition, a powerful organization in the movement for civil rights. In the late 1950s he organized a successful boycott of the Montgomery bussing system. In the sixties he was the leader of the Selma freedom march, in which blacks from all over the United States came to march for their freedom. They were greeted with violence and hatred but they marched on and would eventually achieve their goal.

In 1962 George C. Wallace was elected Governor of Alabama. Wallace made it clear very quickly that he was in favor of segregation, and he was willing to do whatever it took to prevent integration. Wallace knew how to get elected, he tried to appeal to the common working class citizen of Alabama and it worked.² In June of 1963, Wallace, following

²Rollen, David C., Twyman, Robert W. The Encyclopedia of Southern History. Louisiana State University press. p. 29. 1979.

through on a promise, stood in the doorway at the University of Alabama to prevent two black students from entering.³ Jimmy Dale explained that because of his racism and his appeal to the common man, Wallace had gained great support on Sand Mountain, just as he had throughout the state. Wallace would run for president several times, and although he was never elected, his influences are still strongly felt today. Jimmy Dale was fortunate to have been raised to not treat anyone any differently than he would expect to be treated himself. He has never felt any hatred or bad feelings toward black people and he considers them to be no different than white people. Wallace fought to keep schools segregated as had many Alabama politicians before him. In the mid 1950s a legislative committee was formed for the sole purpose of maintaining segregation in public schools. The State constitution was even amended. This committee worked diligently and for many years they were successful in the job that they had set out to do.⁴ After the fight of the committee, and the fight of Wallace, and all of the Alabamians that had fought to preserve segregation. It all finally came to an end. By the mid 1970s most Alabama schools had been integrated.⁵

With the sixties also came Vietnam, and a mother's worries that her son might have to go. Jimmy Dale's mother was not any different from the rest. She and her husband wondered of their son would have go an fight. After Jimmy Dale graduated from high school he had gotten a job at a paper manufacturing company in Chattanooga Tennessee. He worked there for about three weeks and then he came home, he did not like the job in the least. He came Home and got a job in a textile mill in Scottsboro. In February of 1969 the letter that they had hoped never to see, arrived and Jimmy Dale had a fifteen day notice

³Rollen, David C., Twyman, Robert W. The Encyclopedia of Southern History. Louisiana State University Press. p.29. 1979.

⁴Crowther, Edward. Alabama's Fight to Maintain Segregated Schools, 1953-1956. *Alabama review*. pp.206-226. July 1990.

⁵Grolier Multimedia Products. Groliers Multimedia Encyclopedia. Copyright 1995.

to report for duty. He was not the only one from the community that had been drafted. He had friends and people that he had gone to school with that had already left. He went through basic training and was then sent to Fort Gordon in Georgia, where he received specialized training as a military policeman. When his orders were sent down they were what his family had hoped would not come. His orders said that he was to go to Vietnam. He called his family and told them that he was going and two days later his orders were changed and he was sent to Korea. He was based on a missile site as a guard. As he recalls he can vividly remember most of the things that he saw while he was in Korea. He was there for over fourteen months and to this day he remembers almost every detail. He received many letters from friends and family and he said that at many times this is what he looked forward to, and what kept him going. This was obviously hard for a Sand Mountain boy and his family to cope with, especially when the young man has never even been very far from home before. When he saw the poverty that the people of Korea lived in, he realized that even though he had it rough, what he lived through was still very fortunate. In September 1970 Jimmy Dale came home from Korea.

He returned to the textile mill where he had worked before he was drafted and got his job back. The law read that if a person was drafted that they were to get their job back, plus any raises or promotions that they might have been entitled to. Jim began to think about this so he said something to the personnel director and he said that all they had to do was give him back his old job. Jim then called the National labor board and told them the situation, a lawyer was assigned to help him get his job. After several letters and finally a certified letter that told Jim's bosses to get a speaker phone and let Jim be present at a discussion of the problem. the company then apologized and offered Jim his promotion. Jimmy Dale took his promotion, but he never saw any more money. It had been several weeks since the promotion, and one day he told his boss that he wanted his money by the

end of the day or he would call Atlanta. His boss returned with a handwritten check that covered the amount that the company owed him. He showed them that it's not that easy to take an old Sand Mountain boy for a fool. When asked about John F. Kennedy's assassination, Jim replied that not many people on Sand Mountain supported Kennedy. To them He was a Yankee and a catholic and those were just two things that they didn't like. Many also felt that he supported the cause of the blacks. Jimmy Dale worked at the textile mill until 1978. He was married in 1971 and in 1974 his son was born. In 1977 his daughter came along. Jimmy Dale had worked his way to a comfortable position at the textile plant but in 1978 it went out of business. He then worked for a refrigeration company for a while called Halstead and Mitchell. He worked there for fifteen months and in 1979 he began driving a milk truck , which he did for about six months. In 1980 he joined the laborers union and was hired by the Tennessee Valley Authority(TVA). TVA was started in 1933 By Franklin Roosevelt as a Government program. Many business people in Alabama saw TVA as a threat to free enterprise. For a while TVA was locked in battle for territory with Alabama power. Their attorneys fought for over five years. TVA proved to be a big political victory for Roosevelt and the national Democratic party. The North Alabama area of TVA became the most Pro-National Democratic party in the state. When TVA was set up it consisted of a series of Hydro-electric dams on the Tennessee river. It would provide navigation, flood control, recreation, and cheap electricity. It would also open the door to industry . Before TVA the Tennessee valley was the poorest area of the United States. Few people had running water or electricity, and most of them were illiterate. The construction program created thousands of jobs and more importantly, electricity.⁶ Jimmy Dale first began working for TVA in 1980 as a laborer at

⁶Rogers, Ward, Atkins, Flynt. Alabama, The History of a Deep South State. University of Alabama Press. pp.471,486. 1994

fabius coal mine near Stevenson. He worked there for three months and then was hired again by TVA in a clerical position at Bellefonte Nuclear plant in Scottsboro Alabama. He worked there, in a quality control position until 1985. In 1985 he was laid off, and four months later he went back to TVA, This lasted from 1986 to 1988, and he was laid off again. At this point he was becoming frustrated with the way the agency was ran. He knew that it was good for many people, but he feels that he would have been better off somewhere else. He said this was mainly because of a lack of job security. In 1989 he worked for a contractor at Browns ferry Nuclear plant in 1989. The contractor was out of Huntsville Alabama it was called Wyle Laboratories. What began as a temporary job lasted for almost two years. He then worked for another contractor for two more years and in 1993 his career with TVA came to an end. TVA seemed somewhat discouraging for Jimmy Dale, it seemed that just when things looked like they might take shape, he got laid off. He just didn't know the right people at the right time. He was a well respected hard worker and people knew it but no one ever really seemed to give him a break. At one point he called TVA a "kinfolk thing", Meaning that your position stemmed directly from who you knew. Jim then began working for a company in Fort Payne Alabama called Valley Joist. He worked for them until early 1995, and then he got a job working for the city of Rainsville, at their waste water treatment plant and he is currently training to be an operator there. Jim and his wife now live in Rainsville, and Jim's mother lives in Scottsboro, they have left that spot in the road called Macedonia behind, but whether they choose to think about them or not, the memories of those old cotton fields will always be with them.

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CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS ON ALABAMA 1920-1970

1920- The 1920s saw the early beginnings of the great depression in Alabama. Throughout the twenties things such as the decline of the textile industry, falling farm prices, the boll weevil, foreign competition, soil erosion, and mortgage foreclosures became chronic problems. The KKK once again, became a problem as blacks were still treated as second class citizens.

1930- In the 1930s segregation was still very prominent in the state. The Scottsboro case is evidence of this. Labor unions were becoming more and more prominent. The thirties also brought Franklin Roosevelt, and the New Deal. The state benefited significantly from the new deal programs and most Alabamians supported Roosevelt.

1940- The 1940s brought world war II. During the war Alabama Boomed. Racial discrimination was still strong in Alabama. Tension that would carry over for many years to come was beginning to build. The white primary was deemed unconstitutional by the supreme court. Folsom is elected Governor in 46. In opposition to Truman's nomination for the presidency The dixiecrats party was formed.

1950- The 1950s brought even more racial troubles with the Montgomery bus boycott, and the civil rights bill of 1957. this decade saw Alabamians abandon traditional political values.

1960- the state of Alabama did not greatly support Kennedy and Johnson. Kennedy was assassinated in November of 63. the sixties, of course saw racial confrontation at its climax. With Martin Luther King leading the blacks and George Wallace running the whites. In the late sixties and early seventies Wallace Ran for president several, and although he was never elected he had an impact and a lasting influence on politics today

CHRONOLOGY OF JIMMY DALE BOOZER'S LIFE

1949- He was born in red Bank Tennessee and three months later his family moved to Alabama.

1955. He would begin picking cotton and he would also start school at Macedonia Junior High. He worked in the cotton fields all throughout his time in school.

1965- Began High school at Section High School.

1967- He would graduate from Section High School

1969- Drafted and sent to Korea for fourteen months.

1970- comes home from Korea back to Macedonia.

1971- gets married to Karol Hessel From Detroit Michigan.

1974-Has a son Named Adam

1977- Has a daughter named Rebekah

1980- begins working for TVA.

1993- After thirteen years off and on he ends his career with TVA