Living Legacies

Living Legacies Oral History Project, Randolph-Macon College
Transcript of Interview with Hardaway Abernathy

Interviewee: Hardaway Abernathy, Class of 1939
Interviewers: Judee Showalter, Laurie Preston, Sarah Hendricks
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JS: Today is Feb 8, 2008, and we are at Westminster Canterbury in Virginia Beach with Mr. Hardaway Abernathy from the class of 1939. I am Judee Showalter, and Sarah Hendricks and Laurie Preston are also here today. Mr. Abernathy, how did you hear about Randolph-Macon College?

HA: I first learned about it because of church literature. It was identified with the Methodist Church and Dr. Blackwell was a very prominent Methodist. Dr. Blackwell was president of Randolph-Macon for many years as you probably know and my father was very active in our local church, and at one time all of the Annual Conferences were held in Richmond and my father met him and some of the other people connected with Randolph-Macon, and of course, as I say, through the Christian Advocate and the church papers it was listed and some of the ads, regular ads in it, that just if you read the church newspapers you just became acquainted with it. I had never been on the campus until the day we went over there to look at it and that kind of thing. I had no, and I didn’t know anyone who had ever attended there.

JS: So, how did you come to attend Randolph-Macon? You knew about it through the Methodist Church.

HA: When my parents decided that I had the opportunity after several years out of high school, the question was, where do I go? And two or three students, two or three of the boys from the community had enrolled in Lynchburg College because that was from their church denomination. So we drove up to Lynchburg College and we learned what they had to offer and then in our local church we had an attorney there who was a prominent and of course, this person in the community and when he learned that we were looking around for a place he suggested to my father, he went to Randolph-Macon back in the ’20s, and he suggested that we go over and look at Randolph-Macon as a Methodist college, a Methodist-related college that is, and so we did. So my mother and father, and my older brother driving
the car, went over and found Randolph-Macon College and my dad went up into the administration building and met Dr. Blackwell and that was the first official contact that we had had with them.

**JS:** And can you tell us about what you saw on that first visit? What was the college like, or what were your impressions of the college?

**HA:** Well, two railroads running through our little home village, we were naturally impressed with the RF&P Railroad being on the border of the college campus. Then we were impressed with the beauty of the campus, with the fact that the chapel there was such an important building and it was well kept and we took a brief tour of it and we just felt that it had every appearance of every, every appearance of being an educational institution. We also met Dr. Hatcher who was a money man and that kind of thing you know so we, and my dad and Dr. Blackwell apparently had not had close relationships in attending Annual Conference in years before, but they had enough in talking, they learned that they had attended some of the same events there in Richmond and [5 minutes] they became acquainted as friends, and each one apparently accepted the other as a very concerned Methodist and I think that was one of the points that certainly was interesting, and was certainly an important one. It gave Dr. Blackwell I think a little bit of an idea of who we were, what kind of a family we were. And I think that, I think that was always a point of importance in our relationship, in my relationship, after getting on the campus.

**JS:** And you mentioned earlier that this is during the Depression years. So how did you afford a Randolph-Macon education? Did you work?

**HA:** I don’t have a complete answer, but I’ll tell you what I know. At that time since there was the Depression years and the federal government had appropriated money for what was called the National Youth Association, and money was funded to the colleges to assist students providing they were given some employment and supervised employment in something that was gainful and needed at the college. So that program was already in effect. It had been in effect for a couple of years, so out of the conversation of my dad and Dr. Blackwell, Dr. Blackwell indicated that it was a possibility that if I applied they might be able to assign me to that program, which I was successful in doing. And I was on that program for the entire four years I was there. In which I was assigned to a, as a part of team, under leadership of an upper class student, who was sort of the leader to supervise whatever we were assigned to do. And we were assigned to do tasks around the campus from time to time. If you want me to comment on that I will.

**JS:** Yes, I’d like to know what kind of tasks.

**HA:** All right, one thing, we, it was physical in nature, but not labor, muscular labor, labor. In the fall of the year, we raked the leaves that fell to the ground. We raked them into large piles and the school had a team, by team I mean horses or mules, and a large wagon, and when we raked them up and put them in large piles, the janitors and other persons, laborers there, would bring the wagon around with the mules hitched to it and we would put the leaves into the wagons until we filled it up and so forth, and took them down and hauled them. I have to ask this. What is the street that goes down by the bookstore?
JS: Henry Street.

HA: Henry, well across Henry Street, there was a couple houses, residences that faced Henry. Faculty row was from where we exited down to the football field, where faculty members lived. So across the hall, across Henry Street and behind that there was several acres down where some of your prominent buildings are built now, that was farm land and that’s where the team was kept. And in addition to hauling and doing manual things around on the campus, they farmed and grew corn to feed the team, and had a stable down there for them and had a shed for the wagon. So that’s where the headquarters was for the team and so forth and for some of, some of the laborers. So that’s what we did with the leaves. Took them down there scattered them to be pared into the soil for fertilizer. And as a result of that [10 minutes] was one of the things. Another thing, we kept the tennis courts sanded, raked up, dressed up. Dr. Ed Bowen, who was a Latin professor there, was a professional tennis player and he had teams and students, all of his Latin students wanted to play tennis with Dr. Bowen. So, we had to keep the tennis courts that were down across from, where I guess the dining hall is now, right behind the backyards of Dr. Simpson and the faculty row. It was in their backyard. There was no dining hall there at the time. So we kept the tennis courts. When there was a football game, we had portable bleachers in the gymnasium we took them out piece by piece. Put them out on to the football field. Constructed them for the football games on Thursday and Friday. And then on Monday and Tuesday we go back and take them down and bring them back into the gymnasium and set them back up on each side of the gym. And there were things of that kind that would come up that we were assigned to do and that was the type of work. Now there were other students who were lab instructors and doing different things. Library helpers and doing other things, and varying types of jobs. But I happen to have been with the outdoor, I came from a farm, I guess they felt like I ought to be out there doing some of the menial tasks. And we enjoyed it. It was that kind of a thing. It was almost a weekly assignment of something around the campus that needed attention and we, at one time the YMCA cabinet was down the railroad, I don’t know if it is still there or not, was down the railroad and we went down to do some repair work there. It’s a special cabinet down about a quarter of a mile down the railroad tracks right on the edge of the railroad. So it varied and sometimes we did some cleaning up in the buildings but not every day; it varied. So it was the type of thing that there was always something there that needed to be done that we assisted in. Moving furniture from one place to another

JS: You mentioned Dr. Bowen and Dr. Blackwell. Who were the campus fixtures? Who was the faculty and the people that.

HA: I think Dr. Canter was the dean of the faculty at that time. I’m not sure whether it was he or whether Dr. Simpson, Dr. McNider Simpson became a faculty, he was a Math professor, he became a dean later. Dr. Bullington was a Biology professor. Dr. Fox, Dr. Early Fox, was a History professor. Dr. Tarry was the Bible and Philosophy professor. Dr. Day was sort of a special professor that lived just off of the campus and he was the professor of just some general subjects. Dr. Sloan was French professor. I can’t recall the German professor’s name right now but anyway, the German professor was as prominent as any other. There was another Dr. Simpson there in English and a Dr. Fox who was English, so we had two English professors. Young Dr. Simpson later went to Mary Washington College as
president of it. So they were the professors that I had most contact with. That [15 minutes] I thought were.

JS: What was your major?

HA: I took a bachelor’s degree in science. But as I said I had three years of Chemistry, beginner’s chemistry, organic chemistry, and research chemistry, analytical chemistry. I had year of Physics and a year of Biology under Dr. Bullington. So I had the composite of requirements for a Bachelor of Science degree.

JS: And those were taught in Pettyjohn Hall? The building that the sciences were, was that Pettyjohn Hall? The science building, it faced the railroad tracks?

HA: The science building was the one that now the Armstrong Arts Center.

JS: Okay, so that was Pace.

HA: The Pace building, yes, and then there was a brick building behind that and I guess it was, what did you call it?

JS: Pettyjohn Hall.

HA: Pettyjohn Hall, I suppose. I think that’s gone now, but.

JS: It is. And that’s why I’m asking because we are trying to get a picture in our head as to what the campus looked like when you were there. So it was a brick building by the railroad tracks.

HA: yes, and that where we had the Biology and the Physics and some of the Math. Yes, I had the Chemistry. Dr. Fox was there as History teacher. And he was, and Dr. Bowen. Latin and History and Chemistry were in the Pace building.

JS: In the Pace building, okay, and where did you live?

HA: I lived in the middle on the second floor of the middle wing of what we call the old dormitory. I think it is now the Mary Branch. See, there were two dormitories, the one there and the one now that’s been revised and over there next to the library and put into some other use. They were only two that were there. And I, and we called one the old dormitory and the other the new dormitory. We didn’t know them as the Mary Branch and whatever else.

JS: Thomas Branch.

HA: Thomas Branch, but I lived in the Mary Branch second floor middle wing. And where you have now the big pretty beautiful patio, that entrance there, that’s where I entered, you know, over the tongue and so forth from the outside.

JS: What about other activities besides classes, what else did you do?
HA: Well, I was on the baseball squad for three years. I couldn’t do it the fourth year because in my physics, we had extensive laboratory experiences, experiments, that you set up and had to go back during the afternoon and night. All classes ended about one o'clock, but your experiments did not and the length of some of the experiments in physics required, or prevented me, from being, having the time for baseball so I had to give up baseball. I was four years in the Washington Literary Society and had the honor of being president my senior year. I was selected a member of the YMCA cabinet that was in pre-ministerial and others on the campus, and I was on that cabinet. I could tell you more about that if you wanted later. But Dr. Tarry, the Bible and Philosophy professor was sponsor of that. And I, somebody, put my name up, I guess. And I ended up, I think the picture’s in the Annual, somewhere in there.

JS: Yes, it is.

HA: But anyway I was in the YMCA. And, other than that, I was bogged down with my chemistry, my class work and my homework and that kind of thing. I did, there was no dining hall as I mentioned earlier. The dining halls were in professors, or residences around on the edge of the campus and students worked in the dining halls [20 minutes] serving the meals and that kind of thing, and for my last two years there, I had a job in one of those as an additional job. So I got my board, you paid these people who operated the boarding houses. Well I, I was an early riser from the farm days. So I asked to be served, to get over and set the tables up for breakfast. Nobody else wanted to do that. Well, now I’ll tell you the rest of the story. Milk was delivered on dairy trucks in quart bottles. And they were in the days when the cream settled at the top of the quart bottles, and one of my jobs early morning was to go out and bring in those crates of quart bottles. Well, naturally, cereal time came for breakfast so I had a choice of either taking cream off of the top or stirring it up and taking milk so I. The other guys who were coming in later to serve, take the meals in to the tables, never knew that I was eating my cereal and that the milk that they took in had never been mixed.

JS: A little skim off the top there, huh?

HA: And the lady who operated the dining hall, the house, never objected. I mean she knew I was taking care, and she depended on me to get the things in and get the, some of the china and some of the heavy work done before the other, a couple of the other guys came in. But we made out. So they were my last two years there. So I got my board free and that was another incentive and another benefit that I picked up there, just on my own.

JS: Do you remember her name? Whose boarding house?

HA: Mrs. Rice. Her son, Doug Rice, was a student there. She was a widow from a Nottoway County farm and she moved down there and took this job so that her son Doug could go to college. Now I don’t know whether, the house in which this took place. One of the employees there on the staff, I don’t know the instructor, I think a maintenance boy by the name of Taylor, lived in the house, and it was set up as the cafeteria later, I think, on some commercial basis. But anyway it was a residence to start with. I don’t know, the home had a name at the time that was such and such, it was known by a name. But I don’t recall the name.
JS: Interesting. Going back to activities. You were in the Washington Literary Society. What did the Washington Literary Society do?

HA: I don’t know if the desks are still there or not but each of us had a desk, a fold top desk, and somewhere they moved them out and put new furniture in, in the refurbishing and so forth. But we had programs. Of course, George Washington’s portrait was up front and so forth. And we had programs dealing with literature, or dealing with history. We had speakers, we had discussions and we had things of a kind that were intelligent-related and sometimes we even had students to make reports on books that they had read or some of the things of importance in our history and literature. Professors, of course, were always active there in supporting. The Washington was, I think the Washington at that time was a little bit more prone to do that kind of thing, I’m not familiar with the Franklin Program, but [25 minutes] the Washington was literary-oriented and history-oriented and that kind of thing. And of course by the name of Washington, it’s natural.

JS: And what about the YMCA? What kind of activities did they sponsor?

HA: We not only met but of course the Clericus was the organization of the pre-ministerial and we had worship meetings from time to time and we met as a group as, to discuss matters having to do with religious subjects and that kind of thing. And one of the big activities, Dr. Tarry would take in the spring of the year, we went out to, he took us, a couple car loads of us went out to Smith Mountain southwest of Roanoke for a weekend on a rally out there and we met with the YMCA from some other schools there and we spent a weekend out there camping out in the cabins and that kind of thing, and it was a purely devotional type of activity. We had group meetings and then on Saturday night we had a big meeting together and so forth. It was a camping type of activity. We went out on a Friday afternoon after class and came back Sunday, early Sunday morning and that was one of the activities that I considered very important because we met YMCA members from other, some of the other schools around that area and at the same time we enjoyed being together and being off of the campus to enjoy being outdoors and that kind of thing. Now I can lead you into something that is somewhat different that was because, I think because I was on the YMCA cabinet and the other fellows involved also just so happened. Let’s see how I want to say this. I have notes on it, but I’ll, I’d better not look at the notes. The General conference of the Methodist Church scheduled, planned, I mean the staff, planned and scheduled a conference for Methodist college students the Christmas holiday of 1938. That was December right after Christmas of my senior year, in St. Louis, Missouri. And every college, every Methodist-related college was supposed to select delegates and go. Dr. Tarry, of course being the leader, and I don’t know how Randolph-Macon became allocated, allotted five students. When those five students were selected, and I think, I can’t name all of them now I don’t, my memory is not that good. But I was selected as one of the five students to go to St. Louis, Missouri, to that national conference starting two days after Christmas Day in 1938. Dr. Tarry took the others and I had an older brother, who was a career person with one of the railroads, and he was, he wasn’t a top executive but he held a responsible position and he got me a pass to go onto the railroad. So I rode a train out there to St. Louis, first time I’d ever crossed the Mississippi River and this kind of thing. [30 minutes] The conference was held in one of the auditoriums of one of the major hotels there in St. Louis.
Now I thought something, that if you didn’t bring this up I might, so this conference was under the leadership of a lady who has been one of the most impressive persons in my life. *The Enterprise* magazine, which is a publication of the general conference in which I subscribe, carried a message from her. Not necessarily at that conference, but she was the first lady ever approved to preach, ordained in the Methodist church. She has a beautiful history. She’s written two books both of which I have copies and have read. She led and was in charge of that conference. And one of the most effective, one of the most beautiful, and pleasant, dynamic persons. Everything was in order. There wasn’t a lot of confusion. She visited the individual small groups, she gave the messages there. She told us in her words at that time what the Christian life was all about. Now this was a prelude to a general conference meeting of the Methodist Church that was coming later having to do with the dissolution of the Methodist Church North and Methodist Church South. So now maybe there were other conferences across the nation I don’t know but the five of us went.

Well, on the train out there, naturally it was an overnight thing; I had the pleasure of meeting the student president of Blackstone girls’ college, beautiful blonde out of Petersburg High School. And we got well acquainted and enjoyed, you know that, and then after she graduated, she went to Virginia and was a nurse and married a doctor of course, but anyway, it had a social time to it. But this lady here and her two books, she’s written more, but her two books, but that conference. Thinking that the purpose of it was now, is to bring the two branches of the Methodist Church together into the United Methodist Church, well the United when we combined later, but to separate the north from the south because I have attended churches where the glass windows had southern Methodist engraved on them.

**JS:** M.E. South.

**HA:** So this was a historical point and also something of emphasis on Christianity that has been a most important part of my life and I still review the two books that I’ve read that she edited after all of these things took place. One of them was in 1947 and I forget the other one. But anyway, and I didn’t know if you would want a copy I made a copy last night.

**JS:** I would love a copy.

**HA:** But anyway, she was an outstanding lady, an outstanding person.

**JS:** He’s talking about Georgia Harkness. I don’t know if you know her name but it’s big in Methodist.

**HA:** So as, being on the YMCA cabinet was responsible for me getting selected to go to that conference which gave me a much larger insight and a little bit better understanding and experience about our Methodist Church. And I thought it was very appropriate that when we came back then we made our report of our reaction and response to it and some of the details of the conference.

**JS:** Now, but you were not yourself a pre-ministerial student?

**HA:** No. I didn’t feel qualified. I mean I had never felt, [35 minutes] well, I never thought I’d go beyond high school and I never had anticipated. So, well, so that’s the.
JS: That’s fascinating.

HA: And this was just a message that was printed in *The Interpreter*, just a part of a message. It’s a, if you wanted, let’s see did I give you two pages of the message?

JS: Yes you did.

LP: Give the original back to him. There we go. That’s your original. There you go. We just need.

JS: We took the copy. We’ve got the copy. We want you to keep your original.

HA: Alright, okay, okay, alright.

JS: So we took the copy.

HA: So that again was another activity that I had the privilege that added to the classroom work, to the laboratories, to the dropping of the lead ball and a pound of feathers to prove that they both hit the ground at the same time, and that kind of thing. When the professor made that statement at the front of the classroom that day, we had a young man from Norfolk I could call his name, he later became an attorney, but he doubted the professor’s comment that the pound of feathers would get to the ground as soon as the, and the professor, a few days later in the laboratory, he came up with a pound of lead and a pound of feathers and he took this young man to the window and the rest of us in the laboratory and dropped them both out the window to show to him that a pound is a pound.

JS: A pound is a pound. Can you tell us a little bit about what you did after you left Randolph-Macon? Your career was in education?

HA: Yes. The war in Europe had started. The first day I’m, and of course several of the fellows around had gone into high school teaching. And I had majored and so happened that one of my high school teachers had become superintendent of the schools in Lunenburg County, headquartered in the town of Victoria. Coincidentally, I had a brother living in Victoria. And he was the one that got me the pass to go to St. Louis. He had a top job in the Virginia railroad office as, within the superintendent’s office. And I had known Mr. and Mrs. Tom Crittenden. Of course when he taught the chemistry at Alberta High School and he and his wife would come into the drug store where I was chipping ice in the soda jerk and sweeping the floors and building the fires. He knew and had kept in touch with me. He was a VPI graduate and his wife was from Kenbridge. So, somewhere along in the community relations he had gotten word that I was at Randolph-Macon College, one of his students. And I got an indirect encouragement that Victoria High School could use a science teacher. My brother heard about it and he called me and said, “Why don’t you come out and investigate this?” So I did, and I ended up as a teacher therein ’39 and ’40. And my first day of meeting my class was the day that the Germans went into Poland. Now that’s a fact of history. I continued there through that session. In the fall of ’41, my contract was renewed and I began the semester there. [40 minutes]Well in the fall of ’41 was when the national conscription, all what men certain ages came up, closed schools, and I helped register and I signed up and so forth and all like everybody else did.
After Christmas of ’41, I got a leave. I decided that rather than wait for the draft I would see what and at that time college students, especially the men, were getting all kind of letters from the Navy, the Army, the Marine Corps on programs they were setting up because it was evident that we had to get some preparations made. So on a Sunday afternoon, I got on a Greyhound bus and went to Hampton. And Monday morning I got a taxi cab and went over to Langley Field and got in line and enlisted in the Army Air Corps. And of course that was just an enlistment. At that point, at that time, Langley Field was the headquarters, what they called the First Air Force. The United States geographically was divided into four air forces on a geographical basis. Langley Field was the headquarters for everything in the First Air Force, so all the paperwork was there. Alright, so naturally it was a matter of waiting time and to see and you go through the examinations and all of that, the physicals, and so forth, that kind of thing. In the mean time, the closer we got in to it, the headquarters was transferred to Baltimore and all the paperwork was shifted. And there were more enlistments, etc., and of course that put a little delay in the time of my recall, my call into training in the aviation cadet corps of the Air, the Army Air Force, not the Air Force as we know it now, but the Army Air force. We were a segment of the Army just like the military was and the quartermaster and so forth. And we wore the ODs [olive drab uniforms] and so forth.

I was called, it was sometime in early ’42, that I was called to meet the classification board at Camp Lee out side of Petersburg. So I met the classification board there to decide on my record, my status, my age, and everything. I met a general and two majors and they had my school record and things there and my application and they had the different positions and so forth for aviation cadet training. Well I wasn’t hepped on flying. I didn’t know that much about it. I didn’t hold out for it. At that time you see I was getting into the age 22, 23, and that kind of thing. And one of the men said to me, he says well, he says you can qualify, he says but we are actually looking for flyers, we are looking for younger men. And right then they were on the verge of taking high school graduates and putting them through. So the next thing, I took communications because it had some electronics attached to it and I thought my physics and so forth and all. So I went into the communications study, still in the aviation cadet program, but instead of going to a flying school, I went to the communications school. I took my basic training at Boca Raton, Florida and then completed that. My squadron, the boys from other schools the same way, were moved to Yale University.

And the military had almost taken over Yale University. And of course the Air Force was a big part of it. So I was at Yale University using the laboratories for experiments and instructors and so forth. And I took radio, the radio of studying the circuits and the equipment that the military used and the function of each part of it. And some of the equipment that the British Air Force had designed and we went through that, taking Morse code and so forth [45 minutes] because I could have ended up as the operator on a combat plane. But anyway, at Yale University I got my commission as a second lieutenant in August of, must have been August of ’40, it must have been August of ’44 I guess it was, ’43. I guess it was August of ’43, but anyway, and I was immediately assigned to Goldsboro, North Carolina to a P-47 squadron on the flight line of combat training pilots to take care of the installation and the service of their radio equipment to set up a station in which we could be in contact with any pilot who got disoriented or lost and that kind of thing. And we ran sessions to train the pilots. The students, they had
graduated from the flight school and they were, it was their first assignment too and they were training actually to get acquainted with the plane itself and all of its operations. So, just as they had an engineering department, they had a communications department and of course I was in charge of that. I was in charge of the men who were installing and repairing and teaching and that kind of thing, those that are on duty for emergencies. I was later transferred to Wilmington, North Carolina. After about eight months at Goldsboro, I was transferred to Wilmington, North Carolina. The Air Force had taken over what had been the city airport and they had made a B-47 base out of it and to do the same thing that was being done at Seymour Johnson in Goldsboro and I was put in charge of one of the squadrons there. Rather than, I was assistant when I first went on the flight line at Goldsboro, but I was given a squadron of P-47s, pilots training for combat overseas, replacement pilots. It was all replacement pilots. They were training the combat and getting acquainted with the radio and radar and so forth and all, and involved in training the pilots to go out of there into combat as replacements, not as a group.

About the middle of ’44, I guess it was, a group from the Air Force was formed, a special group, and sent to that base. Individuals were chosen for every position in that group. Three squadrons, 75 P-47s from the new square wing type that had just come into being and a new type of Pratt & Whitney engine. So pilots who had trained elsewhere were brought there and ground crews that were trained elsewhere brought there. I was the one person from that field that was selected to take over a squadron of planes and train with that P-47 group, training for combat. So we trained there for several months and then we three squadrons as a group went over on a troop train, a troop train came in and took us over together. We didn’t go as individuals, we went as a group. We went on the train together to the west coast. We processed at Fort Washington at Seattle. We got on the same boat, the troop ship, that went over across the Pacific, into the Pacific for combat and that’s, and over there I was still in charge of my squadron of Air Force and the pilots assigned to it. So it was a team situation all the way through and I was there as preliminary new planes, [50 minutes] the training planes were not ferried over. New planes were delivered to one of the islands in the Pacific. And we had, some of our own people went in an advance party and when we went in, when we went into some of, when our ship that took us over, the troop ship that we were on, took us over, we met our pilots with new planes at some of the landing places and that’s where we debarked and went into action as a group.

We were from the mid Pacific on up through Okinawa, air war over China and air war over Japan, and we were there when the bombs were dropped. We were there waiting for the Japanese to decide that that was the end. On August the 19th, Sunday morning 1945, on Saturday morning the 18th rather, the 16th was Saturday, the 19th was Sunday. We had, see the combat had stopped during the period that the Japanese were considering, but until they actually committed to General MacArthur down in Manila, we were just on guard.

We got notice on the 18th Saturday afternoon that General MacArthur had ordered, all of the time. Let me go back and say, all of this time we had been bombed like daylight and also with their bombers at night on Okinawa and they attacked ours. General MacArthur, we got word on the 18th that General MacArthur had ordered the Japanese delegation to come to Manila to get orders for planning the official surrender on the Battleship Missouri. We got word that four of our fighter planes were given, that General MacArthur had told the Japanese that they would disarm two of their Betty bombers,
which was the bombers that had been hitting us at night. They would disarm them, take all of the armament out of them, paint them solid white. Everywhere that there had been a gun emplacement to put a big green cross over the solid white. He told them what altitude to fly toward Okinawa. He told them what speed. He told them that he would have American planes to intercept them. That there would be on each of these two planes, for the crew, there would be one English speaking person of Japanese descent. That we they be on the same radio frequency, and know that our planes would be on to come out to intercept them, to lead them in.

So naturally that Sunday morning was exciting, the sun came up on the 19th, I’m telling you that island was something else in this world. Four of our P-47s, not from our squadron because the island was full of planes and I, but four of our fighter planes went out to the altitude and the proper place to intercept these two Japanese bombers. They intercepted them, they led them in and they were to lead, all of this was cleared by, given by General MacArthur. One of our planes landed, one of our fighters landed on the air strip that they were supposed to land on and they followed them, two Japanese bombers. They were to, at the end of the runway, turn around, taxi back to the end, the other end of the runway, park their planes there over Saturday night, I’m sorry, Sunday night, transfer to one our big C-54 [55 minutes] transport planes ferried by our own crew to go to Manila to get instructions that he ordered them to come and get for the official surrender.

So naturally everything on Okinawa on that Sunday morning, pictures taken. I’ve got a picture. If you would like a picture I will give you a picture because at that time I was rooming with a photo officer and he had all kind of film and I got some good pictures of that Japanese bomber taxiing by where the runways were lined up just completely and he was standing up on top of Jeep hoods and all like that. And the runways were guarded with infantry with rifles at rest in case there was any opposition. But anyway, they went to, got on to our plane one of our C-54’s there by our crew and they circled around over Okinawa so they could see just what kind of a place we were, went down. The story we got back came back Monday morning, got on their planes and went back to Japan and the story we got was that when their, General Richardson, who was General MacArthur’s chief of staff, and when General Richardson went in to say to General MacArthur the Japanese delegation is here, he says what’s the highest rank in it? General Richardson told him, he says, well you tell them what to do; says nobody in that rank, says I’m not going to talk to anybody in that rank. Now I don’t know if that’s true of not, but that’s the story that got back and it sounds like General MacArthur.

JS: It does sound like General MacArthur.

HA: But, anyway, they came back Sunday, picked up their bombers and went back to Japan and so forth. And of course then we were and of course you know the rest of it Battleship Missouri when General MacArthur stood there and said now the delegation from the Empire of Japan will come forward and sign in the designated places and all, we were listening to all of it on the radio and so forth. You didn’t have television then, but anyway, that and from that point on we were occupation forces until we rotated on basis of our points that we had earned for overseas assignments and so forth. So it was January by the time I got home, January. Let’s see, ’45. No, this was August. I think the official surrender
was sometime in September I think. And I got home that fall, in time to celebrate my mother’s and father’s fiftieth anniversary.

JS: Fun.

HA: And, do you want the P.S. to that?

JS: Sure.

HA: I wasn’t sure what I was going to do the following week. I had some leave time accumulated. And I was actually, I was actually in uniform and required to be in uniform until September ’46. In other words, my orders called for that. I wasn’t decided what I was going to do, and I looked into the G.I. Bill of Rights and I’d had the year and a half, almost two years of classroom teaching. And I decided that I wanted to further my education. So I explored and, in education Columbia University was quite a national reputation. But also George Peabody at the College of Vanderbilt was an outstanding education and when I got information about that I decided to apply to Vanderbilt. So I went to Vanderbilt and mastered in, further education supervision and administration, school law, school taxes, various subjects other than the actual classroom teaching. There were the administrative [60 minutes] types of subjects that you get at the graduate level. I was there for a full session and got a master’s degree, and came back and decided then that I was offered a right good position with a master’s degree. And then I enrolled in a doctorate program at the University of Virginia. And I had, oh by the way, I was called to Korea. I was in the reserves; I was a captain in the reserves and I was called to Korea. When I got back from Vanderbilt my call to Korea was there. So I had to go to Korea, go into the Korean War for 15, 16 months. And so I didn’t get a chance to work between Vanderbilt and Korean War. So after I came back from the Korean War, I went into classroom teaching and had a job, had a position offered, had two positions offered, one at the university to be an errand boy for one of the professors the while I worked on a doctorate and the other was to be a director of instruction in Montgomery County, headquartered in Christiansburg, Virginia, west of Roanoke. And I felt that I need a little work to do. I had taken all of Virginia’s extension work in Roanoke.

And I felt like that getting there and working on a thesis, I needed some more classroom experience. So I took the position as director of instruction in Montgomery County schools. Blacksburg, Christiansburg, and so forth and all. And I had, of course that was Tech country. But Blacksburg we had a. So as director of instruction I was there for six years. Then I was made assistant superintendent. And after assistant superintendent for two years, I was offered the superintendancy of Nansemond County in Suffolk. And we went a total of ten years, built a nice home there, we could have stayed right there, but the superintendent that was there was going to be there for so many more years, so I thought if a job came up somewhere else, so I came to Suffolk, to Nansemond County as superintendent and was there eight years before coming to Virginia Beach when they combined with a county here and I became assistant superintendent here for business and finance. And that’s where I retired. So, and I was there, I was there 14 years with a budget that, in fact, I don’t want this in the record but anyway my first budget.

JS: I have one more specific question.
HA: Now, I haven’t mentioned my church work. But anyway, if you don’t want to hear any more, if you’ve gotten all you want.

JS: Well, I have one more Randolph-Macon question. You have established a scholarship at Randolph-Macon, the Abernathy-Eason Scholarship. Can you tell us what that’s for and what inspired you to, to make that type of gift to the college?

HA: So many people helped me, brothers and sisters, friends, the doctor who owned the drug store where I was soda jerker there out of high school, my parents, but anyway there were Dr. Blackwell and others. So many people helped me along the way. I lived the life that of what Dr. T. McNider Simpson, Math professor, told my class in Trigonometry, the first class I ever attended at Randolph-Macon. Dr. Lindgren mentioned it in his graduation speech. Well,, I mean no need for me to [65 minutes] repeat that because that’s, I just said, I wasn’t trying to give him that. I was totally surprised and shocked and almost embarrassed when I saw it in print and heard about it. I really was. I had no idea. I mean I just spoken I wasn’t given it to him for the record. And I was amazed. But anyway, that account struck me and tied in with all of the people that had helped me, many known and many unknown. And I suppose that it reinforced a way of thinking and a philosophy of life that you owe it back. Others have carried you. It’s like the poet who wrote the account of his dream. That there were two of them, he and the Lord were walking along the seashore and at certain times he saw only one set of footprints and he said to the Lord, “Lord what about this?” He says, “Sometimes there’s only one set of foot prints,” and the answer was, “Well that’s when I was carrying you.” Well I have been carried so much, in so many ways, in so long, from the teaching in the home, to the school, to the college, and so forth. What are you supposed to feel like? You’re supposed to feel like, well, you owe somebody. You can’t pay everybody everything but you owe to others. Somebody has helped you. You have an obligation, fellow. And that has been what I have tried to, not only in that Abernathy-Eason in honor of our families, because both of our families helped me and so forth and so that was for, in memory of both of our families and I reckon you may know that I’m still contributing to it and will continue to contribute to it. And to the college otherwise, soon.

But it’s a feeling, it’s a feeling that grows on you that if you look at these things and realize. If, Dr. Simpson was so true that day. That has become a real part of my thinking. If I have seen further than any other person, it’s because I have stood on the shoulders of giants. Shoulders of giants that were willing to give, that were willing to do this, that was willing to understand, that was willing to help you and that kind of thing, not only my family, but friends and the people who have given me employment, and the church people. I mean it’s a part that, just like a part of my thinking about the church itself. And I don’t want to appear to be overplaying it or hepped on it but it’s a serious matter with me. That what is life about? And if you read the scripture we’ll find that in many instances the master himself told people what he had given them. Now if we’re going take life seriously, and I hope I’m not taking it too seriously because, but I mean these, I got the training at home that led me into this.

My mother and father both grew up in a community where they as teenagers, there wasn’t a church, and their families helped build a little place to meet where there were several families that wanted to meet and read the scripture and talk about it and so forth, and pray. The called it the Whole. Later in
years as they grew up and others in the community, and some of these other families are still there, I could name you about five families that like myself, their descendants are still in that community as the backbone of the church. They built the church [70 minutes] that was christened and chartered in 1875. My mother and father were the first ones married in it in 1896. And they helped build another church in 1921, right next door to it. And that’s where I took the baptismal faith, and so forth and so on. And it’s a history and when you live it, when you live it, it becomes a part of you. And I have had the good fortune of living it in atmospheres and with people and so forth. So I give the college, yes, I give the college credit because I saw in the people who were there one of the things I haven’t mentioned that, but I saw in the professors there the Christian life. I saw Dr. Fox going out into churches. I saw Dr. Canter teaching a men’s bible class that met on the second floor of the chapel every Sunday morning. I saw the Christian life being lived there. So what do you do? I mean, you don’t just disregard those things, honey. I mean that was, that was as much, has meant much to me, in a way more to me than what I learned in the classroom, is seeing how men live and apply. And I’ve taken this seriously because I grew up taking things seriously from my parents.

On the farm, can I tell you this? On the farm we had tasks to do. I was next to the youngest. I was number eight in a family of nine. We had pigs. We grew pigs with the feed. We had cows to milk. My mother sort of ran the house. My daddy ran the farm. But when I got big enough to take the feed that was mixed for the pigs down to the pigs. I had a bucket and the feed was mixed and I was shown how to do and so forth and that was my job till I was grew on up. And finally one day my mother said to me, says, son, says your older brother needs some help in milking, says you’ve been feeding the pigs, says I want you to help him milk. “Yes, mother.” She said, well now you have bucket in feeding the pigs and you have a bucket when you start the milking. Don’t get those two buckets mixed up.

JS: Good advice.

HA: I’ve had a wonderful life, ladies. And I’m proud of it. Now I’ve told you more about myself today than I’ve ever told anybody else.

JS: And we appreciate it, very much.

HA: I’ve even told you about the little blonde from Blackstone College that went off and married a doctor. How much of this are you going to cut out and edit out?

JS: Well, but we do appreciate everything that you have told us today and we have taken much more of your morning than we said we were going to so if there’s.

HA: And I have embarrassed you and imposed on you beyond ever.

LP: It was wonderful.

JS: We were thrilled and it.

LP: Wonderful.
JS: If you don’t have. Are we done?

HA: I’m honored again. I mean, I don’t know. I don’t know that I have said anything. But I do think that the Christian atmosphere on the campus and the professors, it was alive. The Clericus there and the spirit and the YMCA and, something else and, oh, signing every paper, “On my honor I have neither given nor received help on this paper.” Now if that doesn’t do something to you and make it become a part of you. There are so many things there that I could mention. That, you know that the spirit, the in my judgment composes an integral part of the spirit of Randolph-Macon College for me. Now maybe every student didn’t get this, maybe every student didn’t go there with the background that I had at home like this. Maybe there were very many reasons and so forth, but on the morning, on Saturday morning, [75 minutes] or Friday morning when Dr. Sloan had us line up in front of the administration building to check out everything, check out everything, this is my last story, to check out everything to see if you qualified for graduation. The Baccalaureate service was going to be that Saturday afternoon, or Sunday. And they got to my name, “Abernathy, you haven’t paid five dollars for your diploma.” Have you heard this?

JS: I have not.

LP: I have not.

HA: Now, This is the last thing I want to share with you. I said, “Dr. Sloan, I don’t have five dollars.” Now this was on Saturday morning, Friday morning, before the Baccalaureate ceremony on Sunday and the graduation Monday morning, down in the gymnasium. I says, “Can I go up and talk to Dr. Hatcher?” He says yes, says “You’re going to have to pay the five dollars.” Says, “I have to have five dollars for your diploma.” I says, “I thought they awarded that.” He says, “We’ll award it to you after you pay for it.”

So I go up the steps and Dr. Hatcher, I’d been there so long, see your N.Y. [National Youth] checks came in to him and he credited, see I didn’t ever see the check, he just credited it and so forth. So he knew me by name. He always called me Abernathy. He was over there behind the cage. “Abernathy, what do you want now? You don’t need any money now.” I told him, I says, “Dr. Sloan says I can’t graduate, I can’t get my diploma without five dollars.” He reached in his vest pocket, pulled out a five dollar bill and gave it to me. Say, “Here give him this and I’ll put it on your bill.” And I left Randolph-Macon College owing several hundred dollars that I paid off and I think they were satisfied. I never heard any complaint from them.

JS: They were satisfied.

HA: You see, there were things that happened that you don’t forget, that were important to you because of who you were at the time you were. And I apologize for delaying you and taking all your time and all.

JS: No, we’d be happy to listen all day. We’re worried about your time. But we do appreciate your taking this morning.

HA: Have I said anything that’s worth anything to you?
LP: Yes, oh, yes.

JS: Yes. Oh, there was several, I kept thinking I need to write this down.

HA: You’ll have to edit it, you’re going to edit it.

JS: We’ll read it, we’ll read it.

HA: Well, please do because I’ve rambled just a little bit in this and all.

LP: Not at all, it was absolutely wonderful. Go ahead and turn it off.

HA: It’s an honor.