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Luncheon with Reverend Ed Carroll, Professor Humphries, James Eaton, Lael Morgan, Ronald Jobe

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Lael Morgan

Series: Lael Morgan Collection interviews

Reverend Ed Carroll is introduced. He greeted Professor Williams and President Humphrey and guests. He said before he gave his blessing he will be making a brief statement. He said there has been segregation in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the opening of the Alaska Highway. He said he was privileged to be at that gathering when that event took place. He thinks this would be an opportunity for the United States Corps of Engineers to apologize for the lack of publicity to the more than 34 percent who constituted the building of the Alaska Highway. It was more than just a highway. It was a demonstration of a possibility to build a road of access to the Simpson Oil Well which was very important to the allied forces. He volunteered to be a chaplain to men who were from colleges, high school, and from old established military forces to help them keep their perspectives concerning the defense of freedom. He wanted to help Black soldiers to overcome the stigma that they were simply labor forces to only do pick and shovel work. He wanted the people to know that they were capable mentally to cope with the technology of the equipment. Russia and the allied forces had come together to defend freedom against Hitler and the forces of Japan. He feels that this should be a celebration of thanksgiving and apology for overlooking these troops. He said many traveled with considerable expense to get here. He said it is more than just an opportunity to see each other although it has been a joy for him to do that. He feels that they must protest this. He hopes this does not detract from the celebration. He asked all to bow their heads as he prays.

An unidentified person said at this time they will have readings from Professor Humphries, Professor Eaton, Lael Morgan, the Florida delegation and the Alaska delegation.

Professor Humphries welcomed everyone to Florida University. He said he is pleased that they are playing a role to honor the men who were part of the Corps of Engineers who constructed the 1,500 mile highway from British Columbia to Fairbanks. He had to perform a duty for the Department of Education and visit Sheldon Community College in Sitka. He had preconceived ideas of Alaska. He said in Alaska they refer to the United States as the lower forty-eight. He thought he was going to drive to Sitka from Anchorage. He called the person at the school and they told him that he should go to Seattle and then fly to Sitka. He took his advice. He learned about the climate of Sitka. He said everyone flies in Alaska since there really aren't that many

highways which makes the Alaska Highway even more important. He said he is pleased to welcome them to Florida University and thanks them for coming.

Background noise.

Professor James Eaton said on behalf of the Department of History and the Black Archives he welcomes everyone to Florida University. He said they are there to recognize a feat that has been missing in history. His job as archivist is to find the history and to put it in his proper perspective. He said someone called him three years ago from Fairbanks, Alaska. It was Lael Morgan. She was looking for someone to help support the program. They located 75 living individuals who were part of the highway program. They contacted them. Some of them are there to help celebrate the achievement of this engineering feat. He thanked the Friends of the Black Archives for their help. He talked about why Colin Powell could not make it to the celebration.

Lael Morgan introduced herself. She said she is a writer and a researcher. When she found out there was a part of Alaska history that had been overlooked she thought it should be put back in the records. When she asked around for help she heard about James Eaton and the Friends of the Black Archives being the very best people to do it. She thanked them for their work and for hosting the event. She said it is the beginning and not the culmination. She said they will be having a museum exhibit with historical photos and photos of the reunion. It will travel in Alaska and then to Florida. She invited others to inquire about having the exhibit come to their state. She hopes to have a documentary made someday. She said the people who built the Alcan Highway will not be forgotten. As an Alaskan she said they couldn't do without it. She said there were no Black events on the Alaska Highway scheduled celebration. This reunion was blessed by the Alcan Committee. Walter Mason of the 97<sup>th</sup> A Company could not be here today. She said it has been wonderful to meet them all and thanks them.

Bettye Davis from the Alaska delegation greeted the crowd. She said she had an opportunity to meet many of the men who worked on the highway. She said it is her honor to bring greeting from the state of Alaska including the governor. Governor Hickel also had a student come down to Florida, Jamal Haywood. She said she hopes this is just the beginning of many celebrations that will take place. She said she knew about the Alcan Highway but was not aware that there that many Black soldiers working on the highway. She said this information will be put back in Alaska history. She said she would like to help some of them come to Alaska. She said for over 300 years Black men have contributed to the building, preservation and the shaping of the United States of America. She said these men have built roads and constructed homes. She talked about the white officers involved in the project. She said she talked to the men about how they lived when they were building the Alaska Highway. They did get equal pay for equal work. Many of the men returned to school. She talked about the men working on the highway being accustomed to hard work. She said the present Alaska Highway has many improvements.

Announcement of lunch

Colonel Ronald Jobe talked about wanting to be here after he heard about the reunion. He didn't expect to be more than just a participant in the reunion and not a speaker. He explained what his

job duties are. He said he will add to his literature about the participants of the Alaska Highway. He thinks this lost history is so significant. He said Dr. Eaton has brought everyone together so that more people can understand what their great accomplishments were and another generation of Americans can understand what their accomplishments were. He said it is a pleasure for him to be there today. He talked about the history of Blacks in the military. He talked about the present Black veterans making inroads into equal opportunities and the achievements of Blacks in the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. After the Civil War was a Black cavalry, the Buffalo Soldiers. He talked about Black soldiers in WWII including the soldiers who worked on the Alcan Highway. He discussed the Tuskegee Airmen and their missions and accomplishments. Their efforts contributed to the integration of the Air Force. He said as a result of their accomplishments on the Alcan Highway they had a highway for the war effort. He talked about the hardships for them while working on the highway. He said they made a difference. He talked about General Buckner. He said today the U.S. military is the most integrated element of our society. He said the veterans helped to make a difference.