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Interview with
LLOYD PEARSON
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Oral History Collection

Lloyd Pearson

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello Date of Interview: March 11, 1984

Place of Interview: Lewisville, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Lloyd Pearson for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 11, 1984, in Lewisville, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Pearson in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a member of the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression of the 1930's.

Mr. Pearson, even though you gave me this information in a previous interview, I need to get some biographical data. The people who read this interview might not have read the other interview, so tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature.

Pearson: I was born in Omaha, Nebraska, on May 13, 1923, and we left there when I was pretty young. I don't think I ever even went to school there. We moved to Denver, Colorado, and I was in Denver until my sophomore year in high school, and that was the end of my schooling. I got out...I don't remember what year, but I completed the sophomore year or

tenth grade, and that was it.

Marcello: What did your father do for a living while you were in Denver?

Pearson: He was an automobile mechanic.

Marcello: And is this where you were located when the Depression hit?

Pearson: Well, yes. He was making \$12 a week--I remember that-- as an automobile mechanic, and we were living...well, in Arvada and Denver. We lived at Arvada first and then moved into Denver.

Marcello: Is that a suburb of Denver?

Pearson: It's a suburb, yes.

Marcello: How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Pearson: Well, not really too much, as I remember. Well, of course, I was pretty young, but I know we had...my cousin...I had two cousins, both girl cousins. One of them was three weeks older than me, and one of them, I think, was two years older, and they lived with us. Of course, we all lived in a small house, but family kind of took care of family at that time. Their mother...they didn't have a father. He wasn't there, anyway. We all stayed in a small house. I remember that.

My dad made the living for all of us. Oh, it always seemed like we had enough. We ate all the time, and every weekend--there was me and my sister and Dorothy and Maxine, my two cousins--we always got our dime to go to the show and

a nickel for a bag of popcorn. Every weekend my dad seen that we had that. Other than that, that's about the only thing that we had, though, was movies on the weekend and a bag of popcorn.

Marcello: So your father did manage to keep employed all during the Depression,

Pearson: He's always worked. He never was without a job for any length of time. He always did work,

Marcello: I would suspect that he was probably pretty lucky, was he not?

Pearson: Yes, he considered himself pretty lucky because, well, like I say, \$12 then was quite a bit of money. But he was pretty fortunate that he always had a job. Of course, automobile mechanics then were pretty prime. They always could go to work if they wanted to work.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you got into the CCC. For instance, when did you join?

Pearson: I don't remember exactly when or what year or anything, but I'd been out of school...like I say, I quit. I'd been out of school, oh, six or eight months, I guess, or something like that. Maybe it was a year. Anyway, of course, kids didn't work then, and all I was doing was bumming around, really, with a bunch of guys that didn't go to school. We'd go down and sneak into movies and just do different stuff like that. Of course, nobody had any money, either, but we

didn't really worry about it.

But I could kind of see the picture on the wall where I was going to get myself into a lot of trouble if I didn't do something, so I just happened to read about this thing where you could go up there and...it wasn't the military, but it was similar to the military, but you worked. They would pay us for it. Money, like I say, was pretty hard to come by, and so it sounded pretty good to me. I was the only one of that whole bunch that joined. I just went down and talked to them, and I talked to my folks about it, and they thought it was a pretty good idea, so I went ahead and joined.

Marcello: During that period between the time you quit school and when you went to work, did you not pick up any odd jobs or anything like that?

Pearson: Cut grass. Go around and cut grass. That's about all I ever did. That's about all you could do (chuckle) as a kid. I never tried really anything else. I didn't want to (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, so go into as much detail as you can remember with regard to how you actually got into the CCC then. And what year was that?

Pearson: Let's see. I joined the Navy in...it must have been the year of 1939 or 1940. I don't remember just which year it was, but it was 1939 or 1940. I just went down and talked to them about it, and they explained to me that I would

receive \$30 a month for a period of six months and that it was just like the military. We would have uniforms, and it was a military man that was in charge of everything. However, we wouldn't be required to carry guns or take drills. We would be mostly working. Out of the \$30, they told me I would get \$8 a month, and the remainder would be sent home to your parents. I think it was basically supposed to be for kids whose families were pretty hard up, and that money was to be used to help support their family.

However, in my case, it wasn't quite like that because I never had to give any money to my folks. But they told me that what they'd do is that when that \$22 a month that came home, they would save it for me, and then when I got out, I could use it to go back to school if I wanted or to try to find a job or whatever I wanted to do. And that's the way it worked.

We did take a physical, and they told me where I was going to go--what camp I was going to be in. They didn't tell me how much hard work I was going to have to do (chuckle), but I enjoyed it. It wasn't quite what I thought it would be, but I did enjoy it. And it was hard work. We did a lot of hard work.

Marcello: Going back to the actual processing, with whom did you initiate the contact? In other words, was it the Labor Department, the the CCC, the Employment Service? Do you recall?

Pearson: I don't really recall just how I did that. It wasn't through an employment service, though. I read it in a paper or something. I don't really remember, though.

Marcello: Do you recall anything else about the processing, that is, any applications or paperwork or anything like that?

Pearson: Your parents had to approve it because I think I was sixteen or seventeen. Sixteen, I believe I was, when I went in. We took a physical; however, it was not an extensive physical. They talked to you and explained to you what you were going to do.

Marcello: Did you have to prove need or anything of that nature?

Pearson: No, not that I can recall. All you had to do was want to go in, and you could get in. Any kid could get in.

Marcello: And did you go through this process there in Denver?

Pearson: In Denver, yes.

Marcello: How long did you have to wait before you actually got into the CCC and got the whole process moving?

Pearson: I think that from the time I first went down, it was about a week. A week later I was at that camp that they had. Where I stayed was in South Fork, Colorado. It's right at the bottom of Wolf Creek Pass in the mountains. They had different kinds, I think, and they had them designated by letter and number. I know the number we had was Camp F-49C, and it was a forestry camp where you worked in the woods, on roads, and different things like that,

Marcello: Where did you take your physical exam?

Pearson: In Denver.

Marcello: And who administered it? Was it Army or civilians?

Pearson: It was civilians.

Marcello: Was it a fairly rigorous physical?

Pearson: No, it wasn't too bad. Any kid that wasn't in pretty bad shape could pass a physical, and I think that's kind of the way they determined whether they'd put you in a forestry camp or out working in the fields, in the plains, or something like that. We had to work in high altitudes, and that was about the only difference in the thing. You just had to be ready to go to work.

Marcello: How did that physical compare with the one you were to take later when you went in the Navy?

Pearson: It was nothing compared to it (chuckle). As a matter of fact, when I took that physical, I was the only one there. When I went in the Navy, there was a bunch of us. When I took the CCC physical, I just went in a room with a doctor, and they gave me...well, it was just like if you go to a doctor now and get a little examination. There was not much to it.

Marcello: Okay, from the time that you made application and then received your physical, did you go almost immediately to this camp?

Pearson: Right after the physical, I went to the camp.

- Marcello: How did you get from Denver to the camp?
- Pearson: On a bus.
- Marcello: Was this on a bus with a bunch of other CCC enrollees?
- Pearson: No, they sent me down there on a bus because, as best I can remember, I was the only one from Denver that went at that time. Most everybody in the camp was from Texas, and they were mostly Mexican-Americans. I'd always run around with Mexican boys when I was in Denver, but that's the first time I'd ever met anybody that I can remember that was from Texas. Like I say, the majority of them were Mexican-Americans, and they spoke mostly Spanish. We never had any problems with them or anything like that, but they did mostly speak Mexican.
- Marcello: If you could estimate, what do you think would the ratio be in that camp between Anglos and Mexican-Americans?
- Pearson: About two to one Mexican.
- Marcello: I do know that in some cases enrollees were first sent to a conditioning camp, usually at an Army post, where they would receive their clothing and maybe get a physical exam and all that sort of thing. You must have missed that.
- Pearson: No, I didn't do that. All I got was a physical, and then we got the clothing when we got to South Fork.
- Marcello: Okay, take me on a tour through this camp at South Fork. In other words, describe it for me from a physical standpoint. What would I find in the camp?

Pearson: It had barracks just like an Army post. They had the orderly room. It was set up just like a military camp was but on a smaller scale. We had, like, the motor pool. We had a big mess hall, and everybody ate there at the same place. There was only three or four barracks, I believe, that had our company in it. We had a PX and the orderly room.

At the PX we never used cash because with our \$8 that we got, we could get chit books. You could get a dollar chit book or a five-dollar chit book, and that's what you bought your stuff at the PX with. Five dollars could go a long ways then, and you could keep that other \$3 to go to town because we could go to town. We were allowed to go to town, and everyweekend they took us to town. We used to get to Del Norte, Colorado. You could go into South Fork, and you could take a dollar...we was all kids, and we were all under the drinking age, so nobody drank. We drank soda pop, and we'd go to a movie or something like that. That was about the extent of it, so your money really could last you all that time.

Marcello: How far was South Fork from Denver?

Pearson: It was about 200 miles.

Marcello: So they got you far enough from home so that you couldn't scoot home too often.

Pearson: Right. Well, you had your weekends. You could do whatever

you wanted to on your weekends, but I think they discouraged people from going home. See, when I went in, they had side camps, too, that they used to send us to. I went to a side camp in Saguache, Colorado, and I worked up there.

Your folks could come visit you because I know mine did. Most of them had their folks come and visit them. Now the ones from Texas didn't because they couldn't afford to come that far. But your folks could come and visit you, and you could go every weekend.

At the time I was there, I don't think there was over one or two that ever just walked off and didn't come back. Of course, they discharged you just like the service did. You got an undesirable discharge or whatever, but there were very few that just took off.

Marcello: We should have mentioned this earlier. When you did enroll in the CCC, what was the term of the enlistment?

Pearson: Six months. You was in for six months, and then you could stay if you wanted to.

Marcello: In other words, you could reenlist for another six months?

Pearson: Right. It was always six months. Everything was six months.

Marcello: And like you pointed out awhile ago, those who in essence deserted, went over the hill, or who had disciplinary problems could receive a dishonorable or an undesirable discharge.

Pearson: Undesirable. I don't believe they had a dishonorable

discharge, but an undesirable discharge--like a bad conduct, misconduct, and stuff like that. Yes, they got it just like the Army did.

Marcello: How far was this camp from these towns that you mentioned awhile ago?

Pearson: Well, South Fork was the closest one, and it was maybe a mile. I know because you could walk. We used to walk into South Fork. The other towns we went to, like, on a weekend were approximately twenty-five miles or something like that. They weren't very far.

Marcello: How large were these towns?

Pearson: South Fork was real small--a real small town. I can't even think of one to compare with it around here. The other towns were, I'd say, the size of Denton--Del Norte and places like that. They were about the size of Denton. Then there was Alamosa, Colorado, which was larger yet. It was a pretty good-sized town.

Marcello: When you went into South Fork, what kind of a reception did you receive from the local population?

Pearson: Well, it was pretty good in the long run. Some of the fathers didn't want their daughters to go out with you, but I guess they kind of figured you was like the military because we did wear uniforms. The town itself, I think, really accepted us because we were doing work that was beneficial to everybody. We built a ski shelter up on top

of Wolf Creek Pass, which is still there. It's still standing. Of course, skiing wasn't a big thing then as it is now. It was just a log cabin that we built. We backsloped roads to where it wouldn't wash down on them, and we built buck fences up in the hill, which was the hardest thing that we ever did, was build those buck fences. We fought forest fires. Just anything that needed to be done, we did; and I think the people in the town appreciated it.

Marcello: Also, when you guys went to town, you were spending money, and that helped the local economy.

Pearson: Well, right. We spent what we had (chuckle).

Marcello: Let's go back and examine the physical layout of the camp in a little bit more detail. Describe what your barracks were like.

Pearson: Well, they were just like an Army barracks. I know that now, but I didn't then. They were just a big building, and they had the cots in there--just Army cots--and then we didn't have these here furnaces. We had wood stoves in there or coal stoves that burned coal. That's all they were--just a big building with beds in it and a latrine on the end. That was about the size of the barracks.

Marcello: Approximately how many people would there be in one of these barracks?

Pearson: I'd say probably fifty.

Marcello: Did they intermingle the Mexican-Americans and the Anglos, or did they kind of keep them separate?

Pearson: Well, when you was working, you was just right together all of the time. Like I say, everybody got along good.

Marcello: How about in the barracks?

Pearson: In the barracks, it was just all mixed up. It was just however you happened to be, but everybody got along good. Well, you had kids who would get out and fight just like any kids would do, but nobody ever got hurt or anything like that. It was just a bunch of kids having a lot of fun and working. They kept you working pretty hard to where you didn't feel like doing too much fighting when you got home at night.

Marcello: What were the barracks made of?

Pearson: Wood. They were frame, I guess is what you call it--frame, wooden.

Marcello: I do know that in a lot of instances, rookies would have to undergo some type of a hazing. Do you recall whether or not there was any of that sort of thing in this camp where you were?

Pearson: Well, short-sheeting. They always short-sheeted you, and they put water in your bed and different stuff like that. But that was about the extent of it. They didn't do too much to you.

Marcello: Describe what kind of gear and clothing was issued to you

here at South Fork.

Pearson: Well, we got just like the Army. The uniform was the same as the Army except for the jackets. We didn't have to wear a tie like they did in the service, but we had the olive drab pants, boots, and a field jacket-like thing. But we didn't have to wear hats or anything like that. The gear we got issued to us...the best I can remember, they didn't issue us anything, you know, like, canteens and stuff like that. We didn't need it, and we got nothing like that because when we went out and was working in the field... which everything was in the field. But they always brought your meals to you, and you always had your tray and everything there. It was like a picnic. That's about like what it was.

Marcello: How much clothing were you issued? How many of these uniforms?

Pearson: I think we were issued just the one set of...well, like, they call for dress--the pants and a shirt. The fatigues or the work clothes...it seemed to me like we only got two of them, but I really couldn't say. But it seems to me like there was just two of them.

Marcello: And did you mention that when you went into town, you did have to wear the dress uniform?

Pearson: Right. We wore the uniform when we went into town.

Marcello: What kind of an adjustment did you have to make in suddenly being thrust into a semi-military atmosphere?

Pearson: Taking orders. Of course, I'd never been too good at taking orders. I wasn't too good at school at doing school work, so...but you learn. When they said to do something...they didn't put you in a stockade or anything like that, but they let you know that they could get rid of you pretty quick. They had different kinds of disciplinary actions, and I don't know what they were because I never did get any. The colonel or whoever he was in charge of our camp was a military man. He was in the Army.

Marcello: He was Regular Army?

Pearson: He was Regular Army. He was pretty tough, but it seems to me like he was awful fair because he'd talk to you, and he told us what he expected and that you better toe the mark. And most of them did. They had very few cases where they had any problems with anybody.

Marcello: I think we have to remember that getting an undesirable discharge during that time in American history was something that nobody wanted to get. It had a much different stigma than it does today.

Pearson: Yes, it did. When you got out, if you had an undesirable discharge or a bad conduct discharge or anything from the CCC, you couldn't get into the military service if you wanted to. It wasn't as bad as if you got one out of the military, but it was something that you didn't want. Like I say, there was a lot of them there that were thinking about

going into the military because it was one of the better jobs you could get, was in the service. So nobody really wanted one.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you came to this camp as an individual as opposed to being part of a group going in at one time. Were you given any kind of an interview or anything like that and told what was expected of you?

Pearson: Yes. When I got there, that's when they brought most of them up from Texas--all these Mexican-Americans and other ones--and then they put us all in a room as a group. That's when our commanding officer got up and explained the whole thing to you. Evidently, he knew he was talking to kids, and most of them were from families that were in pretty bad shape. A lot of them...that was their only means of money, was what these boys were sending home, which meant a lot, I think, to them, and that's another reason they didn't have all that much trouble. They just had to pretty well toe the mark.

Marcello: I wanted to ask you this earlier when we talked about the barracks. Did you have electricity?

Pearson: Yes, we had lights, but we didn't have no central heating source or anything like that. But we did have electric lights. It was a pretty modern-day camp (chuckle).

Marcello: What time of the year were you there?

Pearson: I was there in the winter.

Marcello: So it got quite nippy there.

Pearson: Oh, it was cold. When we was working on Wolf Creek Pass, well, it snowed. It's right there in the foot of the mountains, and it snowed most of the time. Of course, everybody wanted to be a driver or an assistant leader or a leader because you got extra money for that. I think an assistant leader got \$36 a month, and you got to keep all but the original \$22. The drivers also got an extra \$6. You could get up to \$12 extra, which would give you \$20 a month that was your own, so everybody wanted to be a driver or an assistant leader or a leader. You had to show that you could do it, and they'd give you a driving test. I know we'd come down off them hills a lot of times in them trucks, and them roads was slick. It got to be pretty touch-and-go there at times, but it was good. I think some of the drivers stayed. I know they did because we all could have got discharged at the same time I did, but a lot of them didn't. They went home and came back.

I've run across a lot of people that's been in a CCC camp, but I've never run across any of the guys that I was in there with. Of course, it wasn't long after I got out that I went in the Navy. I think most of them, when they got out, went into the service of some kind or another.

Marcello: When you were out on the work projects, under whom were you working? Was this a Forestry Service project?

Pearson: Well, part of it was, but we worked under just our supervisors or assistant leaders. We had a certain amount of work that you had to do. They never pushed you very hard, but backsloping on them mountains...the only time it was really hard was building buck fences. That got to be pretty tough. We did that all in the side camps. They didn't do that from down there in South Fork. Also, in the side camps is where we worked on the roads and everything. But at the main camp, which was in South Fork, is where we built that ski shelter and things like that. Everything else was done out of the side camps, and you generally went to the side camp for about a month. We had one in Saguache, we had one in Creede, and I think there was one other one; and you generally spent a month in them each time you went to one of them.

Marcello: What would be the purpose in establishing these side camps?

Pearson: Well, up in Creede you was right up in the forest there, and all these here big ravines and stuff like that...that's what these buck fences was built for, was to keep cattle or animals from going over into those ravines. That's where we built all these here buck fences, was around them ravines.

Marcello: So these side camps, then, were probably located a lot closer to projects than the main camp.

Pearson: Right. They were generally right in where you was doing your work where you didn't have to go very far to do anything.

Marcello: That would save you a lot of time.

Pearson: Right.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned the leaders and the assistant leaders. Are you referring to the leaders and the assistant leaders of the work crews themselves?

Pearson: Right. They were people just like us that had been picked. They could either handle people, or they could...well, they were just like a boss. They showed that they could do it, and they got more incentive for it by getting that little extra money. But they were all just like us. Some of them had been there a little bit longer, but anybody could make it. It was just whatever your supervisors could come up with.

Marcello: Now these supervisors that you mention were civilians, were they not?

Pearson: All but the commanding officer. Our commanding officer was the only military man that we had.

Marcello: You had no other military personnel in the camp?

Pearson: Not as far as I can remember. I don't think there was any, just the commanding officer.

Marcello: And the way I understand it, the commanding officer had jurisdiction over the people in the camp, and then once they were outside the camp, they were under the civilian supervisors.

Pearson: Right, yes. Yes, he more or less set up your routine for you, and, like, our meals and stuff like that, he seen that all of that was taken care of. He saw to your basic needs. Like, if you had a problem, you could go and talk to him and tell him what your problem was. Whether it would do you any good or not is something else, but you could go in and tell him. But he took care of your health. Like, it was cold up there in the wintertime, and that's where I found out that every morning when we went to breakfast, we got a half a grapefruit. No sugar. But you had to eat that grapefruit or squeeze it and drink the juice every morning. I guess it was for the Vitamin C. We didn't have to do that in the summertime, but in the wintertime you got half a grapefruit every morning, and you had to eat it.

But we didn't have much sickness. We did have a dispensary, but a cold or stuff like that was the only thing. His job, I guess, was to see that all our health needs was met because every morning--first thing--there was a short-arm inspection. I don't know why because nobody was doing anything (chuckle). But we had a short-arm inspection every morning, and they did that every morning I was in there, in the side camps and everything else. I guess they did it in the Army at that time, too. As far as I know, he was the only military man we had, though.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about a typical day in the CCC. When was reveille?

Pearson: Time-wise, I don't remember. It must have been about six o'clock, though.

Marcello: And how were you awakened?

Pearson: About the same way we were in the service--by a bugle. They had a bugler or a record--I don't know which--but then they had the big speakers on the outside, and that's the way they woke up us.

Marcello: And what would be the next procedure? Did you have any calisthenics or physical exercises?

Pearson: No, no calisthenics. We'd get up, you made up your cot--your bed--and cleaned your area where you was at, went to breakfast. After breakfast you had...not very much time, but you had plenty of time to smoke if you smoked and different stuff like that. Then you went out and started loading up in these trucks to go to different jobs.

Marcello: What did breakfast consist of? You mentioned the grapefruit awhile ago.

Pearson: Well, we always had the grapefruit. Everyday it was something different. We had eggs, but most of the eggs were always scrambled. You had some kind of a meat. We used to get syrup and butter. You could get all the syrup and all the butter you wanted and all the bread you wanted.

One of our biggest things--and I still like it--was to take butter and mash it up on a plate and pour syrup over the top of it and mix it all up and put it on bread and eat it. You could have all of that you wanted. We never hurt for food. We always had plenty of food. Breakfast was just typical, except the eggs were never fried or anything. They were always scrambled.

Marcello: Did you have to take turns mess cooking and so on?

Pearson: No, they had regular ones that did the same thing all the time. We went through the line, and then when you got done, you took your tray back up there, and you put it back in. They had regular people that did that all the time.

Marcello: When did you have the short-arm inspection?

Pearson: First thing in the morning, right after reveille.

Marcello: What would you do? Line up in front of your bunk or something?

Pearson: Well, yes, right by your bunk. They'd just come down and check you just as they'd walk down and out--down one side and down the other.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that after breakfast you would proceed to your work site, and you mentioned that you would normally go there by truck.

Pearson: Right. If it was away from the camp, you went by truck.

Marcello: And what was the first of the projects that you were working on? This ski shelter?

Pearson: The ski shelter on top of Wolf Creek Pass.

Marcello: Describe exactly what you were doing up there.

Pearson: Well, we were clearing ground and hauling in them logs. We'd go out and get the logs. We didn't cut the trees down. I guess the Forestry Service had cut the trees because they knew what they wanted. Then we'd bring the logs down, and they had a supervisor--had certain ones of the guys--who showed them how to do it. But they actually constructed the whole thing. It was just like building a house, and they actually did the whole thing. But all I ever did was drag trees and clear ground.

Marcello: What time would the work normally start?

Pearson: Well, we'd leave, I'd say, probably around seven-thirty, and to get up to the top of Wolf Creek Pass would probably take an hour, the way we was going. I imagine you started to work probably about eight-thirty or a quarter to nine, is when you'd actually get started.

Marcello: I would assume that that was kind of tough work, given the time of year that you were there and the snow and all that sort of thing.

Pearson: It was hard work (chuckle). Yes, it was, but you could stop and rest. I mean, you didn't have certain break periods or anything like that. If you was trying to get one of them there logs down or something like that and you got tired, you just stopped. You didn't spend a whole lot of

time there, but there was nobody up there really on you or anything like that. They wanted you to do a fair day's work, but they never would push you. I never got threatened about what they were going to do if I didn't do so much or anything like that. I think you do more when you're not threatened. Anyway, it was hard work, but nobody seemed to mind it.

Marcello: What time would lunch occur?

Pearson: Twelve o'clock.

Marcello: And you mentioned that the food would be brought out to you.

Pearson: It'd be brought out to you, and it'd be hot. You always had hot meals. In cold weather you did have hot meals. In some of the side camps, we didn't. To some of the side camps, they carried sandwiches. But there at Wolf Creek, they always brought you hot meals. I guess it was because the snow was pretty deep up there. But they always had that hot meal for dinner.

Marcello: What time would you knock off?

Pearson: Three o'clock. It'd be about four-thirty by the time you got back to the camp.

Marcello: And then what was your routine or your procedure when you got back to camp?

Pearson: Well, when you got back to camp, you could go to the PX, or you could do anything you wanted to until it was time to eat. Of course, you didn't have to eat in the mess hall if you didn't want to, but they tried to discourage guys

from going and buying a \$5 chit book...and you go to the canteen, and you could spend that \$5 pretty fast buying candy and stuff like that. They tried to discourage us from eating too much candy and things like that. They wanted us to eat in the mess hall and not to eat that candy or get yourself a candy bar. About everybody that smoked smoked Bull Durham. You could buy a bag of Bull Durham for a nickel, and it'd last you a pretty good while. That's what most everybody did.

See, if you bought a \$5 chit book, you'd try to make it last you the whole month. When we first got there, well, you always owed them \$5 for whatever you got on them chit books because you could get up to \$8 on it. But you got your chit book, and then it came out of your pay because when we first went there, we didn't have the money. So everything came out of your \$8 at the end of the month.

Marcello: And how were you paid? In cash?

Pearson: Cash. If you had any coming (chuckle).

Marcello: What would you do? Go through a pay line?

Pearson: When you go up there and tell them what your name was, they had their list down there; and then they put your \$8 out, and then they had another list that had how many chit books that you owed them for. Then they took the money out of there and put it in there and gave you whatever was left.

Marcello: How often would you get to go into town in the evenings?

Pearson: You could go anytime you wanted to.

Marcello: But you had to go in on your own. There was no transportation provided by the camp?

Pearson: Right. You went in on your own at night if you wanted to go in. Transportation was furnished every weekend. But through the week...they didn't really want you to go, but you could if you wanted to. You could go in, but you had to be back by nine o'clock. I guess they had a bed check. I don't really know. But, anyway, at nine o'clock you had to be back in.

Marcello: What time was lights out?

Pearson: Nine-thirty.

Marcello: I do know that in a lot of the camps, they also had educational programs in the evenings for the enrollees. Was that true at South Fork?

Pearson: I don't know, (chuckle) because I wasn't that interested. Like I say, I wasn't a very good student when I went to school, and so it really never did interest me. I used to like to read, and they did have a library. I did use that a little bit, but not very much.

But they had ball games and all kinds of sports, you know, if you wanted to play. You more or less had to make your own setup, but they did have sporting equipment that you could use. They had balls and gloves and stuff like

that. That to me was more interesting than studying something (chuckle).

Marcello: You mentioned the library. Describe what the library was like.

Pearson: It was just a room in one end of that orderly room. They had dime novels in there; they had magazines; and they also had books. They had dictionaries and stuff like that. They had them in both English and Mexican because, like I say, there was really a lot more Mexicans at that camp I was in than there was Anglos. But they had just about anything you wanted in the library.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that you were working on this ski shelter. Describe some of the other projects you worked on. You mentioned the buck fences.

Pearson: Right. The buck fence was just made out of logs, and we used the aspen trees that was up there. You'd get two logs, and they notched them. They were the heaviest ones that you could get, and they notched them and put them in a cross--kind of a cross like that (gesture)--and then they took these...you had to bring in--I think they were about eight feet long--smaller ones, and you put two on one side and one on the other side, and you went all the way across the country with that thing like that. That's all it was. I think some of them are still standing up there.

Marcello: You mentioned that was difficult work. What made it difficult?

- Pearson: You had to pick up them logs and carry them and drag them back up there. You could bring in any kind you wanted to. If you had one that was out there that was the short one, that they was going to use to make the cross with, they were the heaviest and the hardest to carry, so you tried not to run across too many of them. They were already cut and laid out there for you. All you had to do was pick them up. The longer ones, well, you could just put them up over your shoulder and kind of drag them back down; but the shorter ones, they were kind of hard to get a hold of and...well, you had to have a lot more of the longer ones, anyway (laughter). Sometimes you had to pull them for maybe three or four hundred yards to get them down there, and that's what was so hard about it.
- Marcello: When you were making the buck fences, you mentioned that you were working out of one of the side camps?
- Pearson: Side camp, yes.
- Marcello: Describe what these side camps were like.
- Pearson: You just had the one barracks, and whoever was in charge, I don't think they were military. I think they were civilians. But you just had one barracks, and you had one office room and a mess hall. That was it.
- Marcello: Approximately how many men would be in one of the side camps?
- Pearson: Twenty-five or thirty or something like that.

Marcello: And I would assume the conditions were perhaps a little bit more primitive there than they were in the main camp.

Pearson: Yes. You never went to town when you were in the side camps. You never went to town even on the weekends. You could have people come and visit you, but you never went in on your own into town because you were just out there.

I liked it, myself, because it was...well, you could get in pretty good physical shape and everything when you're out there, and they fed you good. It seems to me like they fed us better there than they did in the main camp, except for sandwiches for dinner. Our morning meal and evening meal, it seems to me like, were better. You could do anything you wanted to on the weekends. I guess you could go to town if you wanted to on the weekends, but nobody hardly ever did.

Marcello: What did you do out there with your idle time?

Pearson: Played ball, sat around and talked, went to the canteen. We had a canteen in the side camp, too, where you could use your chit book. But that's about all. You could do anything you wanted to, but generally not too much because at seven or eight o'clock at night, you were generally pretty ready to go to bed.

Marcello: And I think that would be true not only due to the hard work, but also that altitude.

Pearson: Well, of course, I was from that part of the country, and

I'd been used to it, but a lot of them couldn't even work up there in the mountains because they'd just be so short-winded that they couldn't do it. But it would make you tired. It would make anybody tired a lot faster. But you slept better, and I think it was pretty healthy. Like I say, that's one thing they always did watch, was your health.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. Was that the best physical shape you were in your life, do you think?

Pearson: I believe it probably was--age-wise and the environment and out in the open all the time. Yes, I think that's probably the best shape I was ever in because it was just about six months after I got out that I went in the Navy, and I had no problem at all passing their physical. I didn't weigh very much, but I was in good shape.

Marcello: I have read someplace where studies have shown that the average person who came out of the CCC weighed between seven and fourteen pounds more than he did when he went in. Do you recall whether or not you had gained any weight?

Pearson: Yes. When I went in, I weighed 125 pounds, and I weighed 137 pounds when I came out of the camp.

Marcello: Now is it also not true that the CCC had a leave program, that is, that perhaps once a month you could go home? Do you recall anything like that?

Pearson: Yes, you could go home. I don't remember how often or anything, but you could go home, because I did. I went home,

and my dad had a Willys car, and I took it back with me, and I had that car there. You could have a car. Anyway, he let me have that car to take back to me, and I could have went home several times if I'd have wanted to. But I think I only went home once while I was in there, and I know my folks came to see me two or three times while I was there.

Marcello: How about the holiday routine? Did the camp observe the standard and usual holidays like Thanksgiving or Christmas or whatever?

Pearson: Right. They more or less closed down, like, for Christmas because that's the reason I got out early. I was going to be discharged shortly after, so they released me early so I could be home. There just wasn't much going on. It was the same as the service is. They almost shut down about the twentieth of the month and just had more or less a skeleton crew. They were the same way...for I don't really recall any holidays. I was there for Thanksgiving, but my folks came up. They had a motel, and we went out and stayed in that motel for Thanksgiving. My aunt and uncle and mother and father and a bunch of them came up.

Marcello: You mentioned that you worked on the ski shelter and you built the buck fences. What were some of the other CCC jobs that you did?

Pearson: Backsloping. Backsloping, which is still visible in the mountains in Colorado. All it was...the highway was there...

the highway was built, but around curves and different places you had to go up...you started up at the top of them and took one of them pick mattocks, and you just chipped it off to where it would slope down to the road and get rid of the rocks and all that and more or less make it bare around there so if it rained and stuff like that, everything wouldn't slide down into the road. We did that all over...well, it's still all over the mountains in Colorado where them roads are. There's still backslopes back there.

Marcello: And this was all done by hand.

Pearson: By hand, yes. A pick mattock was what you used. Everything was done...we didn't have anything like electric saws or gasoline-powered saws or anything like that. We didn't have none of that. If you sawed a tree, you sawed it by hand; if you hammered something, you hammered it by hand. Nothing was done with power.

Marcello: Now did you mention that you also fought forest fires while you were here?

Pearson: I fought just one, but then you were strictly under the supervision of the rangers. They would call for however many they needed. Mainly, you carried stuff for the people that were fighting the fire that knew what they was doing. We carried water up there, and we carried supplies. They might give you a shovel and show you that they wanted to bare

some of this ground around there where they were going to try to start a backfire and stuff like that. But you was always under the supervision of the rangers when you did that. I just fought one. When you went to fight them, you were there for the duration. But the one that I went to, I think they had it down in about two days where there was no more to it. We had one that I know they fought for five days and five nights. They took most of the camp from the main camp at that time to go to it, but I was up in one of the side camps, and I didn't have to go.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you in essence spent one enlistment in the CCC. It was not quite six months, but it would have been six months if the holiday had not entered in.

Pearson: Right.

Marcello: Why did you not reenlist?

Pearson: Because I was going to go in the Navy.

Marcello: Why did you decide to do that as opposed to staying in the CCC?

Pearson: Well, I always wanted to be in the Navy, and I wasn't old enough when I went to the CCC camp, but I was when I came out. So that had been my intention ever since I'd been a little kid--to go in the Navy--and that was the reason that I got out.

Marcello: As you look back upon that enlistment in the CCC, do you think it was a good thing?

Pearson: I think it was one of the best things that ever happened to this country. I've said it before, and I wish they had something like that now. I think they could get rid of a lot of the crime that they have, especially by kids and everything. It gives them something to do, and it'd give them a little money in their pocket. But it would give them something to do, and that is the main thing that I think that they need, is something to do--something to keep them busy. They wouldn't have all these problems that they've got. But I think it was one of the best things that ever happened.

Marcello: Now you were essentially a city boy. Did you have any trouble adjusting to the rural life or outdoor life?

Pearson: No. I liked it. Well, of course, I was raised in the city, but every weekend my family...well, you got a car, and you got a little bit of gas, and we went to the mountains. We always went up...because from Denver in thirty minutes we could be up in the mountains and picnic. We used to go get wood that we burned in the stove and different stuff like that. We was out every weekend just about--the whole family. I still like to go out in the country, which you can't hardly find any country anymore (chuckle).

Marcello: At that time, what was the opinion of you and your family toward Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal? Put yourself

back in that time.

Pearson: I always have said that I think he was the greatest President we ever had, and my whole family thought that way because it seemed to me like he was more interested in the people. It was the Depression, and nobody had anything, and he put people to work that didn't have jobs. He took the kids off the streets and put them in these CCC camps. Of course, you had to want to go. They never made you go. But he put people to work, and I still think he was the greatest President we ever had.

Marcello: Well, I think that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview, Mr. Pearson. Once again, I want to thank you very much for having taken time to talk with me. You've given us a good interview on a very important aspect of the New Deal.

Pearson: Well, I appreciate you coming by.