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Interview with
Lawrence Brown
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Place of Interview: Decatur, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Lawrence Brown for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 20, 1974, in Decatur, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Brown in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was employed by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the 1930's. This particular interview is a part of the New Deal Project of the North Texas State University Oral History Collection.

Mr. Brown, even though you've been interviewed before for the North Texas Oral History Collection, would you again very briefly tell me when you were born and where you were born?

Mr. Brown: Okay. I was born on June 1, 1914, in Decatur, Texas, north of town out here in the country. Let's see, we stayed here in Decatur until I was about . . . I guess I was about four or five years old, and then we moved to Fort Worth. We stayed down there until 1929, and then we moved back to Decatur.

Marcello: Apparently, you were in Decatur when the stock market crash occurred and the country plunged into the depression.

Brown: Yes, I sure was. We had a bunch of cattle and we had to sell all of them. We didn't have no feed, and we had a drought along about that time, too. It wiped us completely out.

Marcello: In other words, I gather that you were a farm family, is that correct?

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: Can you be more specific in telling us just exactly how the depression affected your family? You mentioned that you did have quite a few head of cattle and that the depression did wipe you out.

Brown: The depression and then the drought, too, was what hurt us because we went about two years when we didn't have any crops. We sold our cattle to the government; they bought them and then turned around and killed them. You couldn't borrow any money at the bank because what we had to use for collateral was cattle, and cattle was bringing no price at all. In order to get a hundred dollars, they'd allow you five dollars a head collateral on cattle. You have to have too many of them, and, of

course, the dry weather just wiped us out. We just had to get by on what we could get by on.

Marcello: What happened to the bank here in Decatur during the depression? Was it able to operate throughout the depression?

Brown: Well, one of them went broke. The other one . . . it was backed by W. T. Waggoner, and if it hadn't been for him, the First National Bank in Decatur would have gone under. He's the guy that used to be a strong political man in this area in here. He had a couple of big ranches, and then he moved to Wichita Falls where they found a big oil field up there. Through him they kept the bank in Decatur open. Of course, it didn't have very much money. It had a lot of notes that they was carrying (chuckle), and, too, they foreclosed on a lot of people back then in those days.

Marcello: How did your family manage to keep from having their particular farm foreclosed? I assume you had a farm.

Brown: No, we was renting.

Marcello: I see.

Brown: We was renting then on what you call "thirds" and "fourths." It was a third of the cotton you raised and a forth of the corn. You paid rent out of that.

Marcello: In other words, you had to give the landlord a third of your cotton and a fourth of your corn crop?

Brown: Yes. After you sow your cotton, you gave him a third of everything you got out of it. On the corn, you paid him by the regular . . . whatever you gathered in the field, he got a fourth of it.

Marcello: Now, was this what we would refer to as sharecropping? Is this the same thing as that?

Brown: No, this is quite a bit different than sharecropping. In sharecropping the landowner furnishes all the equipment, the tools, the whatnot, and he's putting that up against your work. When you rent, you're furnishing everything. The landlord lets you have his place on the strength that you're a good farmer.

Marcello: How did your father try to supplement his income during these hard times? Like you mentioned, he was getting nothing for his cattle and eventually had to sell all of them.

Brown: Of course, along about that time, or maybe about two years later after that, Roosevelt was in office. When he got elected, he started what they called the WPA. Dad worked on the county roads in the county with his team and wagon hauling gravel and doing first one thing

and then another like that. I believe they paid him two dollars a day for twelve hours' work. Of course, I was still going to school. I went to a country school. Also, they brought a pipeline through there, and he worked on the pipeline until it got to where he couldn't travel to it.

Marcello: In other words, he tried to pick up a few dollars from wherever he could in whatever sort of way he could find.

Brown: Yes. Yes, he sure did. Then we had a good garden, and we home-canned everything. If it hadn't been for that, we would have really been in tough shape.

Marcello: How many were there in your family altogether?

Brown: There was just my mother and my dad and myself. There's only three in our family.

Marcello: Was your particular economic plight more or less the same as that of your neighbors and friends and so on?

Brown: Yes. In the community we lived in we was all in about the same boat. Everybody just helped everybody else out. If they'd kill a cow for beef, we tried to share it all around and sell what we could, whatever we could get from it.

Marcello: I hate to use this term, but . . . I suppose the fact that everybody else was in the same situation kind of eased the blow of the depression a little bit. I hate to use the term "misery likes company," but it wasn't like just a few families were suffering and the rest were still experiencing good times.

Brown: No, that's right, too, because everybody else was in the same shape we were in. I don't know, but it seemed like it kind of brought the people together, more especially in the country. They had their little communities, and everybody pitched in and helped everybody else out.

Marcello: You had a lot of spare time. What did you possibly do in your spare time?

Brown: Usually we hunted. If we could get any shells, we'd go hunting, and if we didn't, we'd go hunting without them (chuckle). We'd tree these squirrels and run them into the holes in the trees. If you didn't have no shells, you'd get up there with a forked stick and twist them out. We had lots of fun.

Of course, you didn't realize that it was a depression because you didn't have any money and nobody else had any money. For entertainment we played

games of forty-two, and we'd go to somebody's house for Sunday dinner. I kind of liked it back during that time.

Marcello: How did it affect your father so far as his disposition and so on was concerned? Did he become moody? Did he become upset because he couldn't provide for his family? Did he feel as though he was a failure or something of this nature?

Brown: No, I don't think he felt that he was a failure. He would get moody at times, knowing that he couldn't get any money. He couldn't borrow any money to make our crops on. Gee, though, he wasn't the only one. Everybody else was the same way. I think we all came through it in pretty good shape.

Marcello: How great was the problem of foreclosures in this area? I'm speaking now primarily of farm foreclosures.

Brown: It was pretty bad. During that time, I happened to get a job working for the bank on these foreclosures. We'd go out there to a fellow's farm and gather up everything he had--his plow tools, his chickens, his hogs, his cows--and just not leave him a thing. I guess there was about two or three hundred farms in this area in here that they just actually foreclosed and took everything they had.

Marcello: How flexible were the banks so far as foreclosures were concerned? In other words, suppose a man suddenly got in arrears on his payments. What sort of a chance would they give him to catch up?

Brown: Of course, too, that all depends on how much money that he had gotten into the bank for. If he wasn't in very deep, they would carry him. But if he was in the bank pretty deep, they'd foreclose on him because they knew he didn't have a chance of getting out of it. Rather than letting him get in any deeper, they would foreclose on him and put him out of business.

Marcello: Did they ever run into any irate or sullen farmers when they moved out to foreclose on these farmers and ranchers?

Brown: No, sir. You'd be surprised; we didn't. I was surprised. I thought some of these people were sure likely to get mad at us for doing that, but we didn't run across one. I guess they were glad to get rid of it (chuckle) because that wiped their debt clean.

Marcello: What would these people do in a situation like that?

Brown: I don't know what the heck they done. I have no more idea than the man in the moon, or even how they made a living after that.

Marcello: What would the banks do with this foreclosed property?
Obviously, there wasn't anybody around that would buy
it.

Brown: They had one man from Jacksboro that bought the biggest
part of it. I don't even know what he gave for it, but
I know the biggest part of everything we got went to
him.

Marcello: I assume that he got it for a pretty good price.

Brown: Yes, he did. I'm sure he did (chuckle).

Marcello: How old were you and . . . let me just go back here
a minute. In 1933, Franklin Roosevelt comes into
office. How did the mere fact of him becoming President
change things for you and your family?

Brown: What he did then, he began turning a lot of money
loose for us and establishing all these work projects
that was going on and trying to get a dollar in a man's
pocket. This was what he was working at. In this
neighborhood in here, it really did help. They paved
the streets in the town. They did all that with
manual labor; there was no machinery. On the country
roads . . . they rebuilt country roads and gave the
commissioners more money to build their roads with.
They did it with the people in the country with their

equipment--wagons and teams and anything else they could scrape up to use. Well, that's what they done.

Marcello: How would you compare or contrast Franklin Roosevelt with Herbert Hoover? Let's say just so far as disposition and this sort of thing.

Brown: I think that here, in this part of the country, nobody liked Herbert Hoover. I know the rabbits running around here, we'd call them the "Hoover hogs" (laughter). People up in here didn't think that Hoover tried hard enough to help out during the depression whereas when Roosevelt became president, the first thing he did was to start opening up banks and getting his secretary of the treasury to turn money loose to these banks so the people would have a chance to get it to start producing.

Marcello: Is it not true that Roosevelt was just the type of individual that could inspire confidence, also? I mean, whenever you see pictures of Roosevelt, he was always smiling. He always simply looked confident.

Brown: Well, yes. Of course, we didn't have no television back then, and the radio talks that he made . . . he didn't talk down to the people--he talked to the people, on their level--and by his speeches he made

and what he was talking about, the average man could understand it and knew what the problem was.

Roosevelt in turn knew what their problem was. So he set the wheels in motion to help the little man.

Marcello: You're speaking now, of course, of the fireside chats.

Brown: Yes. Those were enjoyable to people back in those days by radio.

Marcello: I assume that whenever one of those fireside chats was scheduled that everybody gathered around the radio to listen.

Brown: Anybody that had a radio always had a lot of company that night (laughter).

Marcello: I've heard it said by some people that it almost seemed as though he were right there in the room with you when talking to you personally during those fireside chats.

Brown: That's right. That's right. He could talk to you--he didn't talk down to you--he talked to you. He explained what he was going to do and what we were to do and so forth and so on, and everybody fell in line and went right along with him. To us, up here, we think he's a great man.

Marcello: How old were you when you decided to enter the CCC?

Brown: Let's see. I think I went in the CCC's in . . . I'm not too sure on this now. I think it was in 1934

or '35 . . . somewhere in there I went into the CCC camp. Of course, in each town they had one man that was in charge of this Works Progress. You had to make your application through him and . . .

Marcello: Would this be the United States Employment Agency that was in charge of all these various alphabetical agencies?

Brown: No. In these small towns it was done by the Chamber of Commerce. Usually one man on that Chamber of Commerce was the committee. You made application to him, and he investigated you to see if your family was destitute enough to allow you to go into the CCC. You see, when you went into CCC camp, you got a dollar a day, which was \$30 a month. Of that, you sent \$22.50 back home to your folks. It was sent back home; you never did see it. You wound up with \$7.50 a month.

Marcello: There have been charges from time to time that there was perhaps a little bit of politics played in who got into the CCC and who got employed by some of these other alphabetical agencies. Did you find that this was the case here in Decatur, or did you ever hear rumors of this sort?

Brown: I heard rumors of it, but I don't think that was the case here in Decatur. I think that almost any boy

that wanted to go out of Decatur up here could have gone. But then after I got into the camp, some of those boys I knew had to have a pull to get in there because I don't think they was in destitute shape like the biggest part of us were.

Marcello: From the time you applied for enlistment in the CCC until the time you actually left Decatur, how long of a time lapse is there in there?

Brown: It wasn't very long. It was maybe about a couple of months.

Marcello: But you did have to wait a couple of months until everything was processed.

Brown: Yes. Of course, it depended on the vacancy in the camp. I didn't know where I was going when I enlisted; I just volunteered for the CCC camp. Fortunately enough, I got stationed down here at Boyd. They had a CCC camp down here at Boyd. That's south of Decatur about twelve miles. Some of the boys from this area went to Colorado and up in there to work in the forestry part of it.

Marcello: This seems to have been rather unusual in your case because I think that it was usually true that the CCC volunteers were sent much further away from home than twelve miles.

Brown: Yes. I was lucky. They had different camps. They had what they called a Park Service, Forestry Service, and then the Soil Conservation Service. Fortunately for me, I got in the soil conservation part of it.

Marcello: Did you go directly from Decatur down to the camp at Boyd, or did you go through some sort of an Army processing center first?

Brown: No, I went directly to Boyd. I took my physical and everything down there.

Marcello: How were you transported from Decatur to Boyd?

Brown: It seems to me like there was about three or four of us and somebody--I don't remember now--but somebody from Decatur carried us down there to the camp.

Marcello: Describe what happened then when you got to Boyd.

Brown: It was about the same as an Army enlistment. They gave you a physical, but they didn't give you no test to see how smart you was or anything like that. All they gave you was a physical, and if you passed that, well, then they swore you in. I don't remember now about the oath that I took. I can't remember what all was in it. Then they issued us Army clothes, work clothes, and then we had khakis and the O.D. uniforms at that time, which were green. We wore the

same clothes as the regular Army. Our discipline was the same as the regular Army. We had a first sergeant, and we had a captain and two lieutenants in that company which we were governed by. We were governed by the Articles of War just like the soldiers.

Marcello: I do know that these camps were administered by the Army, and then the projects were usually supervised by one of the government agencies that you mentioned awhile ago.

Brown: Yes. In our case, it was Soil Conservation. What we did . . . our work consisted of running terrace lines, building terraces and check dams and irrigation run-off ditches for this area in here around Boyd, Bridgeport, Rhome, and Decatur. Usually we had to find some farmer that was willing to have terraces run on his land. You'd be surprised at the number of people that turned that down.

Marcello: Was there any special reason why they turned down having this free work done?

Brown: They turned it down because they didn't want their land terraced. They couldn't farm over it. At that time, of course, among the Soil Conservation people, the biggest part of the engineers was made up of

graduates from A&M. Their theory then was that you had to build a terrace real high and not spread it out like they do now. With this type of farm equipment that they had, team-driven, using horses and mules, they couldn't plow those terraces. For that reason they didn't want them, and for another thing, you had to have a run-off ditch down through your field where you brought these terraces together to a particular ditch, and then we built check dams in there to hold the land from washing. They didn't want that in their field. If we could figure out a way to run those terrace lines to the edge of his field, then he would submit to it and let us do it. That didn't cost the farmer nothing. I don't think he even had to buy the concrete that it took to build those check dams. We built the biggest part of those check dams out of rock. I bet you we hauled a million tons of rock down here building those dams.

Marcello: What was the condition of the land like at this time?
In other words, were these terraces needed?

Brown: Yes, they were. All this land up here had been farmed for ages and ages and ages. The farmer back in those days, the only way he knew to run that row was up and

down the hill. Of course, that created a lot of washes and ditches and whatnot. They didn't fill them up, and they didn't try to take care of them. When the CCC camp came in here, they tried to educate the farmer to farm his land on a contour to prevent erosion and whatnot. But it took a long time to do that because you can't hardly change a farmer once he sets his mind to do anything (laughter).

Marcello: In other words, the CCC's were not only engaged in these construction projects, but there was also a little bit of an educational program that went along with it so far as the farmer was concerned, that is, to persuade him that this was the best way to farm his land.

Brown: Yes. We had an agronomist with us, too. He'd always talk to these farmers. We preached strip-cropping on land that they was farming that was pretty sloping. And crop rotation, we preached that to them to get them to take better care of their land. Back in those days, you just didn't tell a farmer that he was doing it wrong because he'd been doing it that way for a hundred years and he wasn't about to change (laughter).

Marcello: Going back just a little bit, after you entered the CCC and had taken your physical and had been issued your clothing and this sort of thing in Boyd, did the Army provide any sort of an orientation program for you to gradually acclimate you to the sort of life you were going to lead?

Brown: No. It was just like the Army; you just go from one to the other, just like that, all at once. I know I got my uniforms and work clothes one weekend, and I went out on a work party the next week. We started building check dams, mixing concrete and cement. The military part of it . . . about all we had to answer was roll call and reveille and then retreat. We had those two formations. Outside of that, we didn't. That's about the extent of the military part of it that we had. But, too, you was in barracks like the Army was. We had big, long barracks, and I think there was about sixty men, I believe, to the barracks. You had to make up your bed and police the area around your bunk, and you had to keep your barracks clean.

Marcello: Was all this sort of activity supervised by the Army?

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had a first sergeant, and I assume this was one of his duties.

Brown: Yes, it was. If you didn't, you had to pull extra duty. If you didn't make up your bunk or clean up around your part of the area, then you got extra duty. You'd pull that extra duty after you got off work that evening. That extra duty then was cutting wood because the cooks burned wood in that old stove they cooked on, and we had to get out and cut wood.

Marcello: After you'd put in eight hours of mixing concrete and building check dams, I'm sure that you really didn't want to cut too much wood in the evenings.

Brown: You'd be surprised. There was very little extra duty going on (laughter).

Marcello: You mentioned the barracks and so on awhile ago. Was this camp located on the outskirts of Boyd?

Brown: At that time it was, yes.

Marcello: About how far was it from the town?

Brown: It was about a quarter of a mile. Of course, back then in those little towns the people of the town didn't like the CCC camps because they were afraid of the boys--afraid of what they might do and might not do. We was fortunate down there at Boyd. The biggest part of the boys that was in that camp was West Texas boys, and the Boyd people took to us. We had a baseball

team down there, and a lot of the Boyd boys played with us on those baseball teams. We intermingled pretty good down there.

Marcello: Of course, I'm sure that CCC camp meant a great deal to the economy of that little town, too, did it not?

Brown: It did. It brought a lot of money in there.

Marcello: I would assume, for example, that most of the--or perhaps some--equipment and concrete and so on was purchased in Boyd.

Brown: It was. Our laundry was done there in Boyd by the local people. There was one lady there that had to launder the whole camp's laundry. Everybody sent their laundry to her.

Marcello: About how many people were in this camp altogether? You'd have to estimate that, of course.

Brown: There was about 250, I believe.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that most of these boys were from West Texas?

Brown: The biggest part of them when I went in down there were all from West Texas. They were a good bunch of boys. We didn't have no rowdies in that camp. Of course, if we did have, we took care of them ourselves. Then we had a first sergeant whose name was Rook Ramsey

from Bridgeport. He was a pretty good Joe. He'd fight you or play with you; it didn't make him any difference. If you wanted to fight, he'd fight you; if you wanted to play ball, he'd play ball. He didn't carry no grudges; he treated everybody alike. He was the type of guy that when he told you to do something, that's exactly what he meant. One or two tried him out, and we found out that it was best to do what the old boy asked, and you'd get along with him a whole lot better. He ruled that camp with an iron hand in one way, but then in another way he didn't. Everybody respected him and done what he told them to.

Marcello: You mentioned that most of the boys were from West Texas. Where did the rest of them come from?

Brown: I'm going to say the biggest part of us was from West Texas besides what they got in in the surrounding counties around here.

Marcello: In other words, there was really no intermingling or mixing of city boys and country boys. Most of these were country boys.

Brown: Most of those we had there were country boys or from small country towns like I was. When the camp moved to Dallas, over there to a little town called Mesquite

. . . of course, we had finished all the work we could do in this area in here, and then we moved to Mesquite. A lot of the boys had gotten out. I believe eighteen months was your tour of duty, and a lot of them had gotten out. I was lucky. I got to stay on awhile longer. The boys that had gotten out had gotten jobs. Of course, during that time, work on the outside had picked up, and a lot of boys had connections in their home towns. So when the work picked up, they went home and went to work. But in Decatur there was no Works Progress like that going on. The biggest part of it was farm work.

When we moved to Mesquite, over close to Dallas, we got a bunch of Dallas boys in there. I guess you'd call them "thugs" or at least we did. Boy, they were ornery guys (chuckle)! You couldn't leave nothing laying on your bed that they didn't steal it. While we were at Boyd we never did lock anything up at all. All the lockers was always open, and if we had any money, it was left in that locker, and nobody ever bothered it. But when we got to Mesquite, we woke up that we was with a different environment, and we had to start putting locks on everything (chuckle).

Marcello: We'll talk about the Dallas camp a little bit later on, but let's stick with the Boyd camp right now. You mentioned the barracks and you kind of described it. I'm sure it was a single-story structure. Was it the tarpaper-type barracks, or how exactly was it constructed?

Brown: No, these barracks were made out of wood. They were long. They was about twenty feet wide and about eighty feet long. They was all constructed out of wood. Our dining room hall was made typical of what the Army would have theirs made. In fact, the whole camp setup was specified by Army engineers. It was built according to Army specifications. Our showers was . . . we didn't have no showers or nothing in the barracks. We had what we call a regular shower house, a bathhouse. It was about a hundred yards, I guess, from the farthest barracks. All the latrines and bathhouse and toilet facilities were located here.

Marcello: What were some of the other buildings in the camp?

Brown: We had what we called a PX and we had an infirmary, which was for first aid only. If you was real bad sick, they brought you to the hospital in Decatur or carried you to a military hospital.

Marcello: In other words, there was no permanent doctor in this camp.

Brown: No, sir, there wasn't. We had a civilian doctor that came in there every morning for sick call. Of course, we had medical aid people. Of course, they was CCC boys.

Marcello: In other words, these were CCC boys that had had some training in first aid or something of that nature?

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: They were more or less like an Army medic.

Brown: That's right, yes. Let's see, there was a tool house where we kept our trucks and all and done mechanic work in. That was about the extent of the buildings.

Marcello: Was there any sort of a recreation program or education program at this CCC camp in the evenings, after hours?

Brown: No, but they had courses at the high school that you could voluntarily take if you wanted to. They'd have teachers come up there and teach at night. A lot of boys finished their high school education while they was in there.

Marcello: In other words, these courses were held at the high school rather than in the CCC camps.

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: Was this the high school here in Decatur?

Brown: It was in Boyd.

Marcello: Oh, Boyd had a high school at that time.

Brown: Yes. A lot of boys finished their high school education while they was in there.

Marcello: A question I wanted to ask you awhile ago is this: you mentioned that prior to entering the CCC's you had been working for that bank. I assume that that job gave out.

Brown: That was just temporary.

Marcello: Until the farms were all foreclosed (laughter)?

Brown: Yes (laughter). I'll tell you, back in those days, you'd work at whatever you could get. Even prior to that I was working on a dairy out here north of town milking cows. I was considered well-off because I was making fifty cents a day and my room and board. I'd have a couple of dollars to spend on Saturday night. I was kind of a big shot; I was about the only man that had any money then (laughter).

Marcello: Describe what a typical day was like in this CCC camp here at Boyd, that is, from the time you got up in the morning until you went to bed in the evening.

Brown: Well, the morning reveille was at 5:30. You got up and cleaned up your bunk and made your bed up and swept out the area and then had breakfast. Usually we

answered roll call at seven o'clock. Then from seven o'clock we were assigned to work details.

That was to go out on these farms. Today you might be building check dams; tomorrow you might be working on terraces. Or the next day you might be mixing concrete. They kind of rotated around. You stayed out there eight hours. If you was too far out, they gave you a sack lunch. They brought a sack lunch to you at dinner. But if you was pretty close in, they brought dinner to you in heavy containers of some kind. I've forgotten now what they were, but your dinners were brought to you. Then we tried to get back in the evening around four o'clock.

They tried to get you back in the camp about four o'clock. Then you cleaned up, and I believe we had supper about five. From five until reveille the next morning, your time was your own. You could go anywhere you wanted to providing you got back on time. There was no restrictions on us unless you had loused up yourself somewhere and got put on restriction and wasn't allowed to go anywhere.

Marcello: What were some of the ways that you could possibly be put on restriction? You mentioned perhaps not keeping

your particular bunking area clean and neat and this sort of thing. What were some of the other ways you could possibly be put on restriction?

Brown: Out in the field--when we was out in the field working-- we had what we called leaders and assistant leaders. They were equivalent to a sergeant and a corporal in the Army. If he gave you an order to do something and you didn't do it . . . of course, you had to have some sort of restrictions, some kind of discipline. If he gave you an order to do something and you didn't do it, he turned you over to the first sergeant when you came in.

Marcello: These leaders and assistant leaders--were these CCC volunteers themselves?

Brown: Yes, they were men that came right out of the ranks. They were men that were selected for promotion. The engineers thought that they had enough know-how to handle themselves as leaders and superintendents of men, so they were the ones that got the job.

Marcello: The actual project supervisors themselves, though, were usually Texas A&M engineers?

Brown: Yes, the biggest part of them was. We had some from SMU [Southern Methodist University] and other universities, but the biggest part of them was from A&M.

Marcello: As you mentioned, this was a Soil Conservation Service project. Did this camp have a particular identification or number or anything of that nature?

Brown: Yes. It was called Company 850.

Marcello: Soil Conservation Service?

Brown: Yes. CCC Camp, Company 850. I got that tattooed on my arm (laughter).

Marcello: That's right. You showed me that the last time I was over when I interviewed you concerning your prisoner-of-war experiences. Since you mentioned it, you might tell me just why and how you got that CCC tattoo on your arm.

Brown: A bunch of us boys went to Fort Worth one Saturday night. Incidentally, that was one thing about the CCC camp--on Saturday night they'd usually run a truck to Fort Worth. If you wanted to go and had any money to spend, they'd take you down there. This particular weekend we went down there and got out on the north side of Fort Worth. Right on the corner of North Main and Exchange they had a tattooing outfit. You know how boys are . . . we got to talking, bantering with one another, "You do it and I will." So I think about nine of us lined up and went through that line (laughter).

Marcello: You were perfectly sober when you did it (chuckle)?

Brown: Yes . . . well, no. I had had a drink or two
(laughter). But that's how I got the tattoo on the
arm. I've tried to take the darned thing off but,
you know, you can't get them things off!

Marcello: It would probably take some sort of plastic surgery
or something to get the thing removed.

Brown: They tell me it takes a heck of a lot of get those
things out of there. That old boy done an expert
job on me, too. It never has faded one bit (laughter).

No, that old CCC camp was pretty good. I really
enjoyed it. You met a lot of guys from other parts
of the country. At night we'd reminisce and talk about
what we'd done or the way things were done in their
part of the country. I don't know. . . I believe it
kind of helped me. It helped me later on when war
did break out and we got in those camps. I know it
didn't bother me near as bad as it did some of the
rest of them being away from home.

Marcello: Did most of the boys on the projects seem to take
the work seriously, or were they time servers?

Brown: No, you'd be surprised. I think that was because they
was from these small towns and were country boys.

Anything they did, they took pride in it. They wanted to do a good job; they wanted to do what they was supposed to do in the way they was supposed to do it. They took pride in their work.

Marcello: I gather then that goldbricking on the job was the exception rather than the rule.

Brown: We had very little of it. Naturally, you're going to have some men in there that'll goof off on you. But usually we'd get to riding him pretty hard, and he'd take up the slack.

Marcello: How great a problem was desertion or AWOL at the camp in Boyd?

Brown: We didn't have any at Boyd. We didn't have no desertions or no AWOL's.

Marcello: How do you account for this?

Brown: That I have never figured out.

Marcello: Do you think perhaps it might be because these boys were all from this area and really weren't far enough away from home to get homesick?

Brown: That could be.

Marcello: In other words, these were relatively familiar surroundings to most of them.

Brown: Yes. And, too, the work that we was doing--everybody liked it. There wasn't nobody riding anybody. Everybody got along with everybody. It was just like one big happy family.

Marcello: I know that from time to time, there could be difficulties or friction between the Army and the civilians representing the government agencies on this project. Were you able to detect what sort of a relationship existed at Boyd between the Army and the Soil Conservation Service people?

Brown: I'll tell you what--the regular Army personnel hated us with a purple passion! We was drawing the same money they were, and we wasn't doing near the duty they was doing. We was having more free time than they were and just having a little better life than what they was putting up with. They hated them CCC boys with a purple passion!

Marcello: How did they show their hatred?

Brown: There was a lot of fights ganged up on that. Usually when they'd send a boy to a military hospital, well, he got the brute end of it--they took it out on him then. They tried to keep us apart all the time.

Marcello: About how many Army personnel were there in this camp at Boyd?

Brown: Let's see. We had three officers. I believe that was it--a captain and two lieutenants.

Marcello: Did you mention a first sergeant awhile ago?

Brown: Now, he was a leader. They made him first sergeant; that's what we classified him as. We called him "Sarge" all the time.

Marcello: But he was actually a civilian and a CCC enrollee.

Brown: Yes. He was like a first sergeant of any military installation. He was in charge of that group of men when we was in camp. He carried out the orders of what the captain or the lieutenants told him to do.

Marcello: Do you remember if these Army personnel were reserves or regular Army?

Brown: They was reserves. The biggest part of them were reserve officers. They were all reserve officers. Now how they got brought into it . . . I think they got brought into it on the training part of getting them used to paper work, handling large groups of men and governing them, which was really good for them.

Marcello: I know in a lot of CCC projects, if you couldn't go out during the regular workweek to the project on account of bad weather, that this work had to be

made up on weekends. Was this the case here at Boyd?

Brown: No, no. Usually when we couldn't go out and work, we'd work there in camp. We'd beautify the camp. Of course, the first sergeant always had the projects going. When we couldn't go out and work, we'd work there in camp. Maybe we'd rebuild something or be painting something or cleaning the area or improving it, setting out grass, working on the baseball diamond. He kept us busy around the camp when we couldn't go out and work.

Marcello: You mentioned a little while ago that one of the times when the Army could get back or get even with the CCC boys was during that period when one of them had to go to a military hospital. Could you elaborate on that a little?

Brown: Yes. They'd give him the devil. They didn't treat him very good from what accounts that we've heard of men that had gone to those hospitals. But if he was sick, he got good treatment. What I made reference to was when he got better and got up to where he could scoot around on his own. Well, those Army men really gigged him everytime they got a chance. If they came through the area where we were--we never did see very

many because there wasn't a very big Army then--they would gig us. One word lead to another, and it usually wound up in a fight if they hung around long enough (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you have any World War I veterans at this camp in Boyd?

Brown: No, we didn't.

Marcello: I know some of the camps did have veterans from World War I, and they were usually segregated or put in an area of their own. Usually they were older than the normal CCC enrollee, and I was wondering if you had any here at Boyd.

Brown: No. I guess the average age of those boys down there in that camp was . . . I'm going to say twenty. That would have been the average age throughout that whole camp. A lot of those boys had college educations that was down there. They just couldn't get anything to do, so they got into that.

Marcello: How much did this CCC check each month mean to your family?

Brown: Well, it meant a lot to them because \$22.50 back in those days brought a lot of groceries and clothes and whatnot. That saved many a family; that carried them right on through.

Marcello: This is the general answer that I get from most of the former CCC enrollees that I've talked to.

Brown: Well, you know, I didn't mind it. Of course, Dad and Mom had raised me on up, and then I had a chance to help them out and myself at the same time, so it really worked out good. I gave them money at home, and Dad could do a lot more with that than I could because all I'd do was just blow it in (chuckle).

Marcello: Get a few more tattoos (chuckle)?

Brown: Yes (laughter). But it really did help. It put a lot of money in circulation.

Marcello: What was the food like in the CCC camp?

Brown: I'll tell you what--we had cooks in that camp down there that were out of this world! Our food was delicious, and there was plenty of it. It was well cooked and served real good. It was family-style meals. When you went in, the table was already set with the food on the table, and we had what we called table waiters. They kept the bowls full, so you never did run out. You didn't leave the table hungry. If you did, it was your own fault.

Marcello: Were these CCC enrollees that did the cooking?

Brown: Yes. Every man in that camp was a CCC guy.

- Marcello: In the case of these cooks, did they receive some sort of special training or . . .
- Brown: No, none that I know of. I don't think none of ours did. Of course, a lot of them old country boys could cook anyway. They got them in there and started out with them, and before they'd get out, they'd train somebody else to take their place. Boy, we had good meals! There was lots of it!
- Marcello: How would you compare this food with the food that you'd been getting at home before you went into the CCC camp?
- Brown: There wasn't no comparison because at home about all we had was beans and potatoes.
- Marcello: Fillers.
- Brown: Yes, and cornbread. Here, the first time I ate down there, I thought, "Boy, oh, boy, that's fit for a king!" We had all kinds of vegetables on the table and steak, gravy, pie, milk, tea or coffee--whichever one you wanted. Boy, that was just like Heaven!
- Marcello: Did you notice an appreciable increase in the weight of the enrollees during their tenure in the CCC's?
- Brown: Yes, you did. All them old boys down there put on a lot of weight. Even at that work they was doing

out in the sun. Every man down there was really in good shape, physical condition. We had very little sickness in that camp, outside of bad colds, maybe a little case of the flu. Oh, Lord, everybody put on a heck of a lot of weight!

Marcello: How long were you down at this camp in Boyd altogether?

Brown: I stayed down there about . . . gosh, I don't know. About eighteen months, I guess.

Marcello: I'm trying to figure out exactly how long an enrollment was in the CCC's, and I was under the impression that it was for six months at a time, and then you could re-enlist. If that's the case, did you re-enlist a couple of times while you were down there?

Brown: That re-enlistment I forgot. I don't remember how long it was. I know I stayed in a little over two years.

Marcello: Here in my notes I see that, in the beginning at least, there was a one-year obligation. Then I think it was increased to eighteen months, so you may not have re-enlisted. You may have been in for one eighteen-month hitch.

Brown: See, that camp was already established down there when I went down there. I thought it was for eighteen months at a time that you enlisted for. Usually you

could re-enlist at your own option. If you wanted to re-enlist you could, and if you didn't you could go on about your way.

Marcello: According to my notes here, it was in April of 1935 when there were some policy changes, and the maximum time of service was increased from one year to eighteen months. You said you had gone in in 1934.

Brown: I believe that's when it was, yes. I'm not too sure.

Marcello: In that case, you may have re-enlisted, or you actually may have come under these policy changes and might not have known about it.

Brown: That's been a long time ago, and, of course, I wasn't very old then. All I was thinking about was having a good time. Working down at that place--I liked the work. While I was down there . . . I made leader while I was down there in that camp, in the survey section.

Marcello: Now what did the survey section do?

Brown: We were the ones that ran all the terrace lines and set the grade lines for the drainage ditches. We worked with the farmer a lot of times on crop rotation and worked with the agronomist. We did map work--we mapped his farm for him--and figured out his acreage.

Then, too, along about that time, they had started this program of farm allotments. I think it started along about that time. The farmer had to know how many acres he could have of this or that. We figured all that out for him, that is, on the ones that the farmer would let us on his place. I know when we moved to Mesquite, I mapped that whole county over there for the Soil Conservation Service. I ran survey lines and map lines. A lot of those terraces and drainage ditches that I helped build are still in operation in that county.

Marcello: That ought to give you some sort of a feeling of achievement when you go back and are still able to see those things.

Brown: It does. Some of those farms there were entirely washing away. The farmer let us in there, and we built those terraces and drainage ditches, and I guess it's been handed down from then on. They've kept the farm up, they've kept up those drainage ditches, haven't let the terraces break. They kept improving it, and they really look beautiful now, they really do.

Marcello: When you go down through Boyd today, which, as you mentioned, isn't too far from here, are you able to see any of the terraces and so on?

Brown: You know, I'm able to see a few of them but not very many. For some reason or the other, these farmers up in this area didn't keep those things going. I don't know if the farm exchanged hands so many times and the guys just didn't take any interest in them or what. I know that I don't see very many up in here.

Marcello: You mentioned that you moved from Boyd, or were transferred from Boyd, over to this CCC camp in Mesquite, Texas.

Brown: When we moved down there, as I was saying awhile ago, a bunch of the boys got out and had gotten jobs elsewhere, and we lost quite a number of men. They built the camp back up to its capacity of the men in Dallas County. The biggest part of them came from Dallas. Them boys was thugs! They picked them up off the streets in the south end of Dallas, and I mean they were toughies!

Marcello: I assume then that your time over at Mesquite wasn't, perhaps, as pleasant as it had been at Boyd.

Brown: No, it wasn't. We had a different type of boys in there. I don't know, just their attitude or something . . . I guess they came out there with their minds made up that they wasn't going to get along come heck or high water. We had a lot of desertions out there;

a lot of them went AWOL. They didn't like that kind of life, and there wasn't enough money for them, and they wasn't going to do that kind of physical work. They were just a different bunch of people altogether.

Marcello: I think we have to keep in mind that the Mesquite that we're talking about is not nearly so large as the Mesquite back in the 1930's. It was just a little town, a little village, back in those days.

Brown: That's right. Mesquite back then . . . I think the population of it was about 900. It was just a little country town, was what it was.

Marcello: I assume it was quite a switch in environment for those city boys to move out to that neck of the woods.

Brown: Yes, it was, because it took them out of the bright lights, and out there there wasn't any. You had a picture show, and I think it was only open about two or three nights a week plus the weekend. Outside activities--there wasn't any.

Marcello: Was this camp also a Soil Conservation Camp?

Brown: Yes, it was the same thing.

Marcello: What was its number, do you recall?

Brown: It was the same number and all. They moved it intact.

Marcello: In other words, had all the work been finished over at Boyd? All that could be done?

Marcello: All that could be done here in this area was finished.

Marcello: And that's basically the reason why it was switched over to Mesquite.

Brown: Yes. When we was here in Boyd, we began to have to travel so far to these farms to work on them. Some of the farms we worked on were thirty miles from Boyd, and they got too far for us. Then they decided they'd move it. How they selected Mesquite, I don't know. I don't know how that was decided on.

Marcello: While you were at Boyd, what sort of opportunities did you have to come home?

Brown: Oh, you'd come home every weekend, or you could come home during the evening if you wanted to and if you could get some transportation to come home in. We just wasn't restricted over there.

Marcello: Okay, so then you moved to Mesquite, like you mentioned. How did this camp compare from the physical standpoint with the one in Boyd, that is, in terms of buildings and this sort of thing?

Brown: The buildings were smaller. They had six-men barracks. Of course, we had a whole lot of them in order to take care of 200 men. But you only had six men to the barracks. I liked it better because here you could

get with six men, agreeable men, to stay in your barracks, and you didn't have to worry about none of your property or anything. Outside of that, it was all the rest of it just about the same.

Marcello: What sort of bedding were there in these barracks?
Did you have cots or bunks or what?

Brown: When we was in Boyd we had cots, Army cots. Then when we got to Mesquite, we had those Army steel beds. They were narrow . . . they wasn't like a cot. It was a flat bed and our mattresses were a lot better. The equipment that we used was a lot better over there at Mesquite than it was at Boyd.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you were working the survey lines and so on over here in Mesquite.

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: Was this the principle job you were doing here?

Brown: It was. Also in Mesquite, I did the same thing over there. Our survey crew was what started the terraces and the drainage ditches for the rest of the men to come behind us and build.

Marcello: I would assume that from the physical standpoint working on the survey crew was not nearly so physically tough as, let's say, the actual mixing of the concrete and building of check dams and this sort of thing.

Brown: No, it wasn't.

Marcello: I guess this was one of the privileges that goes with seniority. At this time you had a little bit of seniority.

Brown: Well, I've often wondered how I got on that. I think I got on that . . . I met two boys, got acquainted with two boys down there, and they was in that survey party. They got an opening; one of the boys quit. I started out by carrying stakes. That's where I got my start in the survey party. That's where I got my start. Then I went from stakes to a rodman then to a chainman and then from that to running a survey instrument on it. That, and with the education I got out of those A&M supervisors we had . . . those were really good guys on that survey party. They would try to teach you everything they knew about surveying. A lot of guys, when they got out of that, they continued on with that kind of work in some way or the other. I know that when I got out down there at Mesquite, I worked for the county agent at Dallas for about a year doing the same kind of work. That was during the program of . . . when they had the crop allotment deal . . . that we went out and chained off these farmers'

areas for acreage and whatnot. We'd tell them they had too much or didn't have enough and such stuff as that.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that there was quite a bit of friction between the city boys and the country boys here in Mesquite. Did this friction break out into fisticuffs from time to time?

Brown: Oh, it did in Mesquite.

Marcello: That's what I meant. I keep saying Boyd, but I meant Mesquite.

Brown: When we got to Mesquite, we had a lot of fights down there--practically every morning. Of course, the old West Texas boy, he's kind of a slow sort of a guy anyway, and he's kind of hard to make mad, but when he gets mad, there's no stopping to him. I guess those Dallas guys . . . we wasn't used to them, and they just rubbed us the wrong way. They'd say we was dumb so and so's and how good they were and whatnot, and that just didn't go over too well.

Marcello: You did mention awhile ago, also, that there was quite a bit of desertion down here at this camp in Dallas. What were the reasons for this desertion? Do you know or do you have any guesses on the subject?

Brown: The only thing that I could figure out was that the guys just didn't want to work. It was too far from Dallas for them. Of course, at that time, Mesquite was, what, about twenty miles out of Dallas, and the only way you could get there was by bus. It took those guys out of the bright lights and put them up out there in those barracks. I believe it was ten o'clock that you had lights out, that you had to go to bed. They didn't want any part of that. In fact, they just didn't like none of it. To me, I think that's one of the many reasons that they deserted.

Marcello: How did the quality of the work at Mesquite compare with that that had been done in Boyd?

Brown: When we was at Mesquite, we built those check dams out of concrete. We poured them with forms, whereas in Boyd, we built them all out of rocks. So in comparison of the two, I think the work at Boyd was a lot more prettier because those guys took lots of pain in laying those rocks. You just couldn't put a rock up there and make it lay and put concrete to it and make it stick. You had to lay it a certain way. In Mesquite, when you poured all those things with concrete, you just built a form and poured it and walked off and let it.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that the city boys didn't seem to like that work too much over there at Mesquite. Did their dislike for the work actually affect the work? In other words, was there more goldbricking and slacking over here in Mesquite?

Brown: Yes, there was. There was a whole lot of it going on over there. Those guys didn't want to handle the forms; they didn't want to build the forms; it was too hard for them. They just didn't like that kind of physical work, that was all.

Marcello: I assume that they caused both the Army and the Soil Conservation Service a great deal of trouble then over this.

Brown: They did. Yes, they did. They cost the government a lot of money to try to keep those boys out there. They could have half-way tried to get along but they didn't want to.

Marcello: How did the food at Mesquite compare with that over in Boyd?

Brown: It was still about the same. Those cooks that we had there went with us. We had the same mess sergeant, and there wasn't any difference in our food supply. Maybe so, it was a little bit better for some reason

or the other. I don't know whether it was because Dallas County produced more produce out of the farms than they did around here near Boyd.

Marcello: Having moved to this camp over at Mesquite, did this curtail the amount of time that you could spend at home or the number of times that you could come home?

Brown: Well, I couldn't come home near as often as I did. Usually I'd come home about once every six weeks. There was five of us boys down there from Decatur, and usually we'd decide on what weekend we was going to come home, and we'd save our money, and then we'd all come home on the same weekend and get by pretty cheap like that.

Marcello: As you look back on your experiences in the CCC's, do you think that the whole operation was a worthwhile one? In other words, did the taxpayers get their money's worth out of the CCC?

Brown: Well, I do. I think they got their money's worth. The program that it was set up for, I believe it did all the way through. And I know it helped out a lot of men that if they hadn't have had that program they might have been thugs and thieves and whatnot. The program itself, I know it helped me, and I know a good

number of the boys that it helped, that profited by it.

Marcello: How did the CCC experience help you or ease your transition into the Army?

Brown: In my case it helped me a great deal because I was already accustomed to that sort of military life around the barracks. I was accustomed to taking orders and giving orders and carrying out orders without asking a whole bunch of questions. To me, I couldn't tell any difference in it. In fact, I was already used to it when I went into it, so it didn't bother me one little bit. I know a lot of boys that it did. It was their first time away from home, and they got homesick (chuckle). It's funny to me but I guess it was pretty serious to them.

Marcello: If we were to ever experience a depression of that nature again, do you think that the re-establishment of an organization such as the CCC would be a good thing to do?

Brown: I do! I sure do! For the amount of young people that we got, and if we do have another depression and there's not going to be any jobs for them, none whatsoever, it would be the best thing in the world

for them. Of course, they may not think so now, but when you get down right to the brass of it, it would be the best thing in the world for them. It keeps them out of the streets and keeps them from getting into any kind of meanness that they otherwise might be doing and put a little money in their pocket-- not much, but it would put a little money in their pocket.