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Interview with
J. W. Buck
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Place of Interview: Decatur, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
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Oral History Collection

J. W. Buck

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Decatur, Texas

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. J. W. Buck for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 4, 1976, in Decatur, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Buck in order to get his experiences and reminiscences and impressions when he was a member of the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression of the 1930's.

Now Mr. Buck, even though this is the second time that you have been interviewed, the first time being when I interviewed you concerning your experiences as a prisoner-of-war, there's a good possibility that nobody will have read your first interview. So why don't you just give me a brief biographical sketch of yourself again. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Buck: I was born on May 12, 1920, up here in Montague County just right across the Montague and Wise County line. At the age of about five, I guess, I moved to Fort Worth. We lived there then until the depression hit. Then we

moved back to Wise County and started farming. The biggest part of my schooling was in a little country school out here and then the Decatur school. At the time I went into the CCC camp, I was in the last half of the eleventh grade, which then was . . . I lacked about a half-year finishing. So a friend tried to go to the CCC camp, so I decided I'd go with him. We signed up, and that's how I got in that thing.

Marcello: Okay, let's go back just a little bit, and we'll fill in some background information here. How old were you when your family first felt the effects of the depression? That's assuming that the depression started in 1929 with the stock market crash, and then, of course, things got worse from there.

Buck: Well, in 1929 is when it hit. I was nine years old.

Marcello: How did the depression affect your particular family?

Buck: My father worked for the Gulf Oil Company. He went to work one morning, and he came back--he was out of a job just that quick. So about all we could do was gather everything up and move to the country, and we started . . . back then there was lots of small farms, and we moved in on one and started farming.

Marcello: Did your father have a relatively good position with the Gulf Oil Company? In other words, did he make an adequate living and this sort of thing?

Buck: Yes, he did up until that time.

Marcello: How long did you stay in Fort Worth until you moved up into this area again?

Buck: It wasn't very long. I don't remember just how long, but just shortly after he got out of work we moved.

Marcello: Did he ever attempt to find any additional work around Fort Worth?

Buck: He had previously, several years before, worked for an oil mill down there, and I think he went back over there. They wouldn't hire him either, so he decided we'd better move out. He had a brother who had owned the farm, and we moved in on it.

Marcello: Did you say he had tried to get work on an oil mill?

Buck: Oil mill company.

Marcello: Cotton oil mill.

Buck: Cotton oil mill.

Marcello: Did a lot of people do this at that time, that is, when they were out of work, did they try and move onto a farm or something of that nature?

Buck: They did. There was quite a few of them that moved out of Fort Worth into Wise County. I know there . . . oh, three or four families moved out before we did that was in the same class I was in.

Marcello: How come there were so many farms around here that could be utilized?

Buck: That I couldn't answer you. There just wasn't too many farming, I guess, then because all the places were in small acreage--between sixty and 100 acres.

Marcello: What sort of farming did your father do?

Buck: Just truck farming.

Marcello: In other words, vegetables and things of that nature?

Buck: Vegetables and watermelons and things like that.

Marcello: How did you have to change your style of living over what it had been in Fort Worth? I'm referring now in terms of the clothes you wore, the food you ate, and whatever amusements you had and things of that nature.

Buck: Quite a bit.

Marcello: Let's take food, for example. How did your diet, perhaps, change?

Buck: Our diet changed from the stuff you'd buy to what you raised on the farm. Mostly what we ate was what we raised.

Marcello: Did you get very much meat?

Buck: Yes, we raised our own meat. That's one thing we had-- plenty of meat and vegetables. Back then a loaf of light bread was a treat, though. We had biscuits and cornbread. About each Saturday maybe we'd get a dime to go to town and see a movie.

Marcello: How about clothing and things of that nature?

Buck: Just hand-me-downs was the best you could get to do anything with. There wasn't very many bought.

Marcello: I would assume that in the summertime you went barefoot most of the time.

Buck: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Well, let me ask this question. How many of you were there in your family?

Buck: There were seven.

Marcello: That includes your mother and father?

Buck: Yes.

Marcello: Did all of you pitch in and work on the farm?

Buck: Yes, sir, we all worked that were large enough. Now I had a brother and sister that wasn't large enough to work on it.

Marcello: What did you particularly . . . what were your jobs on the farm?

Buck: Hoeing mostly and chopping firewood, and the duties around the farm like gathering up eggs or . . .

Marcello: Just the general farm chores, in other words.

Buck: Yes.

Marcello: Did you ever have any way to supplement the food that you would normally have on the farm? In other words, would you do very much hunting or things of that sort?

Buck: We did quite a bit of hunting. We'd have squirrel and . . . well, it was mostly squirrel. We hunted squirrel more than anything else, and sometimes rabbit.

Marcello: Was it around here that they used to refer to rabbits as "Hoover Hogs?"

Buck: Yes (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you ever hear that expression?

Buck: (Chuckle) Yes, I have. Yes, a lot of people ate rabbits. We had a neighbor out there that specialized in hunting these . . . what they used to call a swamp rabbit. They were good eating. It'd come a big snow, why, we'd wrap our feet up in burlap bags and here we'd go.

Marcello: In other words, you would track down rabbits and things of this sort?

Buck: Track then down. We'd climb trees and push squirrels out . . . hollow trees. All in all it was . . . people enjoyed themselves more than they do now, really.

Marcello: Do you think they enjoyed themselves because everybody was more or less in the same situation? I hate to use the term "misery likes company," but everybody was more or less in the same economic situation.

Buck: Yes, it could be.

Marcello: What did you do for entertainment during those depression days?

Buck: Oh, we had parties and at school we'd have ball games. They'd have pie suppers, which they'd go and auction off pies, and ice cream suppers. Everybody'd bring them a freezer of ice cream and a cake or something.

Marcello: In other words, you had to make your own fun.

Buck: You had to make your own fun.

Marcello: Where did your father sell the produce that he grew on the farm? Was it usually sold here in Decatur?

Buck: Sold it in Decatur.

Marcello: How much would he get for this produce?

Buck: Very little. I don't remember what it was, but I know it was a small amount.

Marcello: Was it always in exchange of money, or sometimes did he trade it for other things?

Buck: He got money most of the time for it.

Marcello: Did he ever make enough money during this time that he could save any?

Buck: No, I don't think anybody saved any money during that time.

Marcello: What happened to the banks around here during that period? I know that a lot of rural banks simply went out of business. Do you remember what the case was here?

Buck: I believe this bank held up. It was one of the few that did.

Marcello: I was going to say that that would be very unusual. How about farm foreclosures? Were there very many farmers who lost their farms during this period because they couldn't meet their mortgage payments and so on?

Buck: I don't think so. The guys that financed them didn't want them either. I mean, you know, as far as . . .

if they could get anything out of them, they wanted . . . of course, we didn't buy. We rented, or you might say "sharecropped." It's actually what we went into.

Marcello: In other words, some other private individual owned this farm?

Buck: He owned this farm, and he'd get so much--a third of this and a fourth of this--and we'd do the farming on it.

Marcello: Did that usually work out to everybody's satisfaction?

Buck: Everybody's satisfaction.

Marcello: Okay, now in 1932 Franklin Roosevelt was elected President. Give me your early impressions of Franklin Roosevelt if you can--either your own impressions or those of your parents and so on.

Buck: Well, now I'm speaking for my parents, and they liked him alright up until this cattle killing business come up, and they objected to that. But up till then, I think they did like him.

Marcello: Did you ever . . . do you remember your parents and their friends and so on ever listening to the fireside chats and things of that nature?

Buck: No, normally when friends were together the kids were out playing. Along about that time, I was a twelve-year-old kid and never paid much attention to what they said anyhow.

Marcello: Okay, when did you join the CCC?

Buck: In 1937.

Marcello: Describe the background by which you got into the CCC. In other words, first of all, tell me why you wanted to enter the CCC.

Buck: Well, I'll go back to the same thing I told you about the Army deal. A friend of mine signed up for it and wanted me to go with him. So I quit school and . . . I went home one afternoon and never did go back and check my books in or anything. I just signed up, and we left for CCC camp.

Marcello: Where did you sign up to get into the CCC?

Buck: At the courthouse up here. We had a lady here that signed you up.

Marcello: What sort of a procedure did you have to go through in order to become eligible for the CCC?

Buck: Well, she had the records on nearly everybody. I qualified and the reason I got . . . she was a good friend of the family. When I went up there, she went ahead and signed me up.

Marcello: In other words, did you go through this process all in one day?

Buck: Yes, I believe I did. I think I went through it in one day, and I believe it was two days later that we left. We caught a train down at the depot.

Marcello: Okay, so you joined the CCC, and, as you mentioned, approximately two days later you were off to wherever you were supposed to go. Where did you go?

Buck: I went to Fort Worth and took a physical down there and joined a bunch more from other surrounding areas. From there we boarded a train and went to Globe, Arizona.

Marcello: Was this a fairly rigorous physical examination that you had to take?

Buck: Just about like a military physical. It wasn't really tough.

Marcello: Was it administered by the Army?

Buck: Yes, sir.

Marcello: When did you leave for Globe, Arizona, that is, how shortly after you took the physical?

Buck: I believe we was down there . . . I believe we stayed in Fort Worth one night and left the next day.

Marcello: In other words, you never did come home?

Buck: No, I never did come home after that. Once I left here it was . . .

Marcello: Were you issued any of the CCC uniforms or anything like that in Fort Worth, or did you get those later?

Buck: We got those later after we got to Globe?

Marcello: Okay, what did you think about the idea of going to Globe, Arizona? I'm sure you had never been that far away from home before in your life.

Buck: No. Oh, I guess I was thrilled over the idea of traveling.

Marcello: About how many of you were there on this train that were going to Globe, Arizona?

Buck: I think there were seven from here and . . . there was quite a crew from around other areas. I wouldn't know how to guess how many.

Marcello: Why was it that they would send you so far away from home?

Buck: I guess to keep us from being tempted to go over the hill and go home because there were many of them that did. They'd get dissatisfied, and the first thing they'd do . . . they'd catch a freight train out of there or something.

Marcello: How long did it take you to go from Fort Worth to Globe, Arizona?

Buck: I don't remember. I think it was approximately a week.

Marcello: Did you sleep on the train?

Buck: Slept on the train.

Marcello: Okay, you got to Globe, Arizona. So what happened at that point?

Buck: They moved us out to a camp and issued us our clothes.

Marcello: Was the camp already constructed when you got there?

Buck: The camp was already constructed and had quite a few in it. As a matter of fact, they'd been working there--

I don't know--quite awhile. They moved us in there and issued us our clothes, our mess gear, and assigned us barracks. Well, I guess you would call it barracks. There'd be approximately fifty to the barracks.

Marcello: Okay, describe what this camp looked like from the physical standpoint. In other words, what sort of buildings did the camp contain?

Buck: I believe it was wooden buildings. It's been a long time, and I'm not sure. We had a mess hall. Well, I'm sure it was wooden buildings because we had the mess hall, and we had a canteen. It was just nearly like the military. As a matter of fact, it may have been a military base turned over to the CCC. I don't know.

Marcello: What sort of a terrain or area was this camp located in?

Buck: It was in the mountains. We used to spend a lot of our time up in those . . . exploring those mountains back in those caverns and things. I didn't stay at the . . . we had this . . . Globe was the base camp, and then we had a side camp in Miami and one in Superior. I think I stayed in Globe two weeks, and then I transferred to this side camp at Miami.

Marcello: Okay, about how big was this camp at Globe?

Buck: I'd say there were, oh, approximately six or seven hundred boys in it.

Marcello: Where did they come from? All over?

Buck: All over. Well, you name it and they was there.
All nationalities and everything. That was one of my
first experiences with integration, I guess.

Marcello: They had blacks in this camp?

Buck: They sure did.

Marcello: That was unusual. I was under the assumption that most
of the CCC camps had been segregated.

Buck: Not where I was at--neither one. I'm positive there
were blacks. As a matter of fact, I cooked. We had
a black cook, and he and I slept in the same room back
in camp.

Marcello: Was this quite an adjustment for you to make?

Buck: No, not really.

Marcello: About how many blacks were there in this camp at Globe?

Buck: Oh, I'd say a half a dozen.

Marcello: Were most of them engaged in commissary-type work?

Buck: As much as everybody else. There weren't no difference.

Marcello: In other words, they did all sorts of jobs.

Buck: Yes.

Marcello: Did the presence of these blacks in the camp cause any
friction or problems at all?

Buck: No. They had more problems with the Mexicans than there
was with the blacks.

Marcello: Oh, you had quite a few Mexicans in this camp?

Buck: Yes.

Marcello: What sort of problems resulted here?

Buck: The difference in the radio programs. Back then radio was all you had. We had one radio in camp. The biggest trouble was which one could get to this radio and get their program--whether it was Spanish or American.

Marcello: Where were most of these Spanish boys coming from? The Southwest and California?

Buck: I just don't know.

Marcello: How long did you say that you remained in this camp at Globe?

Buck: About two weeks, and then I moved to a side camp.

Marcello: Okay, during this two-week period what did you do?

Buck: I rode a maintainer up and raked the snow and stuff off the mountain roads back up in the mountains.

Marcello: Now what did you do?

Buck: I just rode this maintainer, a road grader.

Marcello: A road grader that maintained the roads up in the mountains. Did you have to go through any special training to learn how to operate this?

Buck: I didn't operate it. I just rode with him. If we went through a gate or something, I had to get out and open the gate. That's about what it amounted to (chuckle).

Marcello: I see. In other words, it wasn't really tough physical work.

Buck: No. I was real small. All during the CCC I got a break in everything there was because I was very small for my age.

Marcello: What sort of uniforms were you issued?

Buck: The Army-type uniforms--OD's.

Marcello: In other words, the olive green drab.

Buck: Yes, olive drab.

Marcello: How many of these uniforms were you issued?

Buck: I think two dress and quite a few fatigues, which was . . . I don't remember just how many. I know we had two dress uniforms.

Marcello: Did you undergo any sort of an orientation program during this two-week period? Or did they just issue uniforms, assign your bunk, and put you on a project?

Buck: Put you on a project. We didn't go through any . . .

Marcello: And in your case you were riding on this road grader. Did you do this for the entire two weeks that you were there at Globe?

Buck: I believe I did. That's the only thing I can remember doing, riding that up through the mountains.

Marcello: What government department set up the projects here at this camp?

Buck: The Forest Service.

Marcello: Okay, you're working under the Forest Service. And, of course, the camps themselves were operated by the Army.

Buck: By the Army.

Marcello: Okay, so you were here at Globe for about two weeks, and then you moved to one of the side camps. Which one did you move to?

Buck: Out there at Miami. We called it the JK Side Camp. It was on the JK Ranch.

Marcello: How far away from the main camp was it?

Buck: Approximately 100 miles.

Marcello: How did you get there?

Buck: By truck.

Marcello: Okay, what did this side camp look like?

Buck: It was wooden barracks and on a smaller scale. We only had about forty boys in there.

Marcello: Now were there Army personnel at this camp, also?

Buck: No, we were strictly with the Forest Service.

Marcello: In other words, you were not under the jurisdiction of the Army at all here.

Buck: No.

Marcello: What sort of projects were being utilized here at the side camp?

Buck: Building roads. We built roads back into the ranch where there'd never been one into. Everything that went in there went in by pack mules.

Marcello: How did you go about building this road? In other words, I assume it was a dirt road, and you used graders and that sort of thing.

Buck: Yes. We had, or the Forest Service did, had operators. And some of the CCC boys, they taught them to operate the equipment after they got up there.

Marcello: What sort of work did you do at this camp?

Buck: I was their powder man for a short while, and then one of the cooks went back to the main camp. I decided I wanted to cook, and I started cooking.

Marcello: Had you ever cooked before?

Buck: No, I never cooked in my life.

Marcello: Did you get any training at all in this camp?

Buck: No, not when I started cooking. The cook left, and I took over on a Sunday morning. We had . . . at noon we had chicken. I cooked that chicken. It was black on the outside and red on the inside (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you get very many complaints from the people?

Buck: Not a complaint. They were the most patient people I ever saw until I learned to cook.

Marcello: About how long did it take you to learn to cook?

Buck: Oh, I'd say probably a month. They put up with it. But forty people like that can . . . we was all so close together that I guess they could afford to put up with it a little.

Marcello: How many people worked in the cook shack?

Buck: We had two shifts, and two cooks to a shift, I believe.

Marcello: And it was here that you were on the same shift with this black man.

Buck: Yes.

Marcello: What was a typical day like for a cook here in the CCC camp? In other words, describe what a typical day was like from the time you got up in the morning until your shift was finished.

Buck: You get up in the morning, and we had to build a fire. We'd burn wood. We'd build our fires and serve breakfast.

Marcello: About what time did you get up?

Buck: I believe about four o'clock because we had to have them out to work by eight. We'd get up and serve breakfast. Then we'd have to clean our dishes up. We'd do our own dish washing.

Then about the time that was through, we'd start preparing their noon lunch. Part of the time we'd have to carry it out on the job where they were at. Then by the time we came in and prepared their supper, we pretty well had a day in. We'd work two days on and two days off.

Marcello: Now what were the cooking facilities like here at this camp?

Buck: Just old iron cook stoves. We had big pots. We had plenty of groceries. That's one thing--just nearly everything we wanted to cook, we could get.

Marcello: What sort of meals would you be serving? Let's take a typical breakfast. Normally, what would be served for breakfast?

- Buck: Normally, bacon and eggs or sausage and eggs or . . .
nearly always the eggs were scrambled, though.
- Marcello: Would the men get as much as they wanted?
- Buck: They had all they wanted.
- Marcello: How about a typical lunch? What would it consist of?
- Buck: Well, we tried to work a menu out where it'd be . . .
where they'd have roast or steak or maybe some chicken.
- Marcello: Now would this be at lunch, or this is dinnertime?
- Buck: Dinnertime.
- Marcello: A lot of times at lunch, did you not make sandwiches
for them to take along to the job?
- Buck: Sandwiches. On weekends, more or less, we used sand-
wiches. At dinnertime on Sunday, and then Sunday
afternoon . . . well, Saturday afternoon and Sunday
afternoon, both, we'd serve sandwiches.
- Marcello: How about during the week when you were taking food
out to the men on the job? What sort of food would
they be getting then?
- Buck: They'd be getting just regular food. They had their
mess gears, and we carried it out in pots. If they
were too far out, though, we'd prepare lunches for
them, and they'd take them, carry them with them.
- Marcello: About how far from the camp were these projects normally
located?
- Buck: Oh, I'd say about two or three miles, and then they
extended on farther as we went in. But at the beginning
of the project, we were about . . .

Marcello: This may be something that you don't know about, but I'll ask you anyhow. You mentioned awhile ago that you were building roads on these ranches, that is, the CCC crews were building roads on these ranches. How would this be done? In other words, would the rancher have to pay anything at all?

Buck: I don't know. I don't believe he did because I know . . . I just couldn't answer that. But we built fences on some of them. I don't believe the rancher paid anything on it.

Marcello: Did you remain a cook the entire time that you were here at this camp in Arizona?

Buck: Yes.

Marcello: And did you remain at this side camp for your entire first hitch in the CCC?

Buck: All but about two weeks before discharge time came. Then I went back to the base camp.

Marcello: You mentioned that while you were here as a cook, you worked two days on and had two days off. What did you do in your time off?

Buck: Just fool around in those mountains. On Saturdays we'd go to town. We had to ride in the back end of a truck to get to town. We'd do that on Saturdays, come back Saturday night, and Sunday we'd rest then because that was a long ride.

Marcello: What sort of entertainment were you able to find in town? Was this in Globe?

Buck: No, it was in Miami.

Marcello: Miami, okay. What sort of recreation did you find in Miami?

Buck: Well, it was wet. We'd generally go in and get a little wine. I had a problem because I was small, and you had to be a certain age before they'd let you have it. But I usually managed somehow (chuckle).

Marcello: What sort of reception did the CCC boys receive from the local townspeople?

Buck: Not very good, I don't think. I don't think they were real well liked.

Marcello: Why was that?

Buck: It's just like . . . one man can ruin a whole organization. Just like the Army. Around Army bases people don't much like soldiers. It was the same way with the CCC's. And we did have some rough characters. They were from all walks of life. Dope peddlers and everything else were in there. Back then it was really something, you know. There was a boy from Houston who tried to get me to go back down there and run dope with him. They'd got hot on him. He'd gotten in the CCC's to get away from the law.

Marcello: Did you find that city boys had a tougher time adjusting to CCC life than country boys?

Buck: No, I don't think so.

Marcello: Did you have very much trouble adjusting to the life in the CCC?

Buck: No, I didn't.

Marcello: Why do you think this was?

Buck: I don't know. Well, all my life I'd worked. The only difference was I was away from home working. I enjoyed it. Like I said, I was small. I got petted more or less. If there was a good easy job, they'd give it to me. That's how I got into cooking. When I said I wanted to cook . . . we called him "Uncle Lee."

Marcello: Uncle who?

Buck: "Uncle Lee." He was a forest ranger that was in charge of the side camp. The old man took a liking to me, and if there was anything I wanted to do nearly, he'd let me do it.

Marcello: What sort of pay were you receiving when you were in the CCC?

Buck: I received eight dollars a month, and they sent twenty-two dollars a month to my parents.

Marcello: You never saw that twenty-two dollars, did you?

Buck: No.

Marcello: Was the eight dollars a month that you received enough to take care of what ever wants and needs you had there?

Buck: Oh, yes. That was a lot of money then. We'd shoot dice and this, that, and the other. If you didn't

lose it all, you'd do pretty well on eight dollars a month.

Marcello: Did they have a canteen here at this base camp?

Buck: Yes, we had a canteen and had canteen books. You could get one if you needed to.

Marcello: How would the canteen books work? I've never heard of these before.

Buck: You'd buy them, actually, and then you'd take . . . when you got your pay, they'd take it out of them.

Marcello: In other words, they had coupons in them.

Buck: Coupons in them worth so much.

Marcello: I asked you awhile ago if this base camp had a canteen. What I was really referring to was the side camp. Was there a canteen there?

Buck: No, we didn't . . . a small scale. I believe we did, too. It's where we'd get our cigarettes and things, but it wasn't like . . . in the base camp we had pool tables and everything in the canteen.

Marcello: I would assume that at the side camp you simply could purchase, what, the bare necessities?

Buck: Yes, until you went to town. I enjoyed it because . . . that was strictly volunteer if you wanted to stay at a side camp, and I spent my whole hitch there nearly.

Marcello: Oh, did you volunteer originally to go to these side camps?

Buck: Yes.

Marcello: Why did you want to stay in a side camp?

Buck: That I can't tell you--the experience, I guess, just something different. Then when I got there, I liked it. I would always nearly try anything once.

Marcello: How great a problem was discipline in these camps? In other words, was discipline a problem?

Buck: No, it wasn't. Once in awhile there'd be a little trouble, but most of the time discipline just took care of itself more or less.

Marcello: Did you have very many guys that went AWOL?

Buck: Not particularly in Arizona, no. There wasn't too many.

Marcello: What would happen if a person did go AWOL?

Buck: Nothing. He'd get dishonorable discharge, which I don't think ever amounted to much. But I never did want one.

Marcello: How much did that twenty-two dollars a month that was coming home mean to your parents?

Buck: Well, really, they didn't use mine. They saved it for me until I got home. But we couldn't get money back in camp. The next time I was in, we'd write home for money, and they'd sent you money back to camp. But in Arizona we couldn't get any back in. We had to make out on eight dollars a month.

Marcello: Oh, in other words, your parents couldn't send you any additional money.

Buck: No.

Marcello: Why was that? Was that to make sure that that money would come home and remain home and serve its purpose?

Buck: Serve its purpose.

Marcello: That's very interesting. I'd never heard that mentioned before, but it certainly makes sense. Now how long was this first hitch that you were in?

Buck: Six months.

Marcello: And in our conference that we had before the interview started, you mentioned that you decided to sign up for another hitch. Why was that? Why did you decide to sign up for another hitch?

Buck: That was after I came home. Well, it was just something . . . I liked it, and so I signed up again and went to Vetran, Wyoming. It's a small place. It sits right there on the line.

Marcello: How long did you remain at home before you had decided to re-enlist?

Buck: I think less than six months.

Marcello: What did you do during that six-month period?

Buck: While I was home?

Marcello: Yes.

Buck: I don't think I did anything. I think that's one reason I went back.

Marcello: Did you try and find a job?

Buck: Yes, but there wasn't no work there.

Marcello: When you re-enlisted, what procedure did you have to go through in this instance?

Buck: Just like I did the first time. I had to go back through this office up here and sign up. You didn't know where you was going or anything until you got . . . well, actually to Fort Worth. They shipped you out of there to the camp that you're going in.

Marcello: Did you have to take another physical exam?

Buck: I believe I did. I'm not sure, but I believe we did.

Marcello: Okay, what did you think about the idea of going to Wyoming?

Buck: I liked it till I got up there. I didn't like it after I got up there. I don't like that country.

Marcello: What sort of a camp . . . I assume you went there by train?

Buck: Yes.

Marcello: What sort of a camp was this camp at Vetran, Wyoming?

Buck: It was out on the railroad, and it was a small camp. There were barracks like the rest of them--wooden barracks. At this particular place, Vetran, that depot was all there was to Vetran. I mean, that was all there was to it.

Marcello: In other words, there wasn't really a town there.

Buck: No, it was just a depot. We went in there and . . . I'm not even sure who I was working for then. I think it was the Soil Conservation Service we went into because we was digging canals and things like that.

Marcello: What were you doing?

Buck: Putting rocks on the side of canals where they irrigate. We'd take a rock half as big as this room, and two men would work it down to little small-sized rocks.

Marcello: In other words, you were taking big rocks and breaking them to make smaller rocks.

Buck: By hand.

Marcello: In other words, this was with a sledge hammer.

Buck: Sledge hammer.

Marcello: I would assume that this was pretty strenuous work here at this camp.

Buck: It was, but my size got me out of it again there.

Marcello: What'd you do?

Buck: I usually held the one that had the sharp edge on it, and the bigger guy'd always hit it. I'd just sit there and hold it while . . . move it over to another seam and hold it there.

Marcello: That could be pretty dangerous work, I would assume, though, if the guy hitting that sharp edge wasn't very accurate with his swing.

Buck: Yes, it could be, but I never even thought about that.

Marcello: How big a camp was this at Vetran?

Buck: I believe it had about five barracks and probably fifty men to a barracks--probably 250 men.

Marcello: Were you under the military at this camp?

Buck: Yes, we was under the military there.

Marcello: Describe what the military discipline was like in this camp.

Buck: The only thing it . . . we hold a retreat in the afternoon, and that was about the only thing that was anything military about it.

Marcello: Well, did you have to go to bed at a certain hour at night, and get up at a certain time in the morning?

Buck: Yes, in all camps you had a certain time to go to bed and a certain time to get up.

Marcello: Did the military ever inspect these camps, that is, your living quarters and things of that nature?

Buck: No. If they did I never knew it. We was out at work when they did, if they did.

Marcello: About how many military people were there in this camp?

Buck: I believe one. The commanding officer, I believe, was the only military we had.

Marcello: Was he a reserve officer, or . . .

Buck: Reserve officer.

Marcello: Is that right? That probably might explain why the military discipline wasn't quite what one might expect under regular Army people.

Buck: The one we had in Arizona was an artillery reserve officer, and I don't remember what . . . I didn't stay in Vetran long enough to find out too much about it.

Marcello: How long were you there altogether?

Buck: Approximately two months, I think. It took me that long to get out.

Marcello: What was the food like here at this camp at Vetran?

Buck: It was about the same as it was at the other one.

Marcello: Awhile ago when we were talking about your experiences as a cook, there was a question that I forgot to ask you. When you were a cook, were you also in charge of procuring the food?

Buck: No, they brought the food in to us.

Marcello: Was it usually bought locally, however?

Buck: Yes, I think so.

Marcello: What were your barracks like on the inside here at this camp in Vetran?

Buck: They just . . . they were wooden floors, and we had big coal heaters. We'd usually chip in and pay one guy to keep the coals going all night, so the next morning we'd have a good warm place to get up in, which I don't think . . . I don't know what we paid him--so much a month--and everybody'd pitch in. He'd maybe make two or three dollars a month off of it by the end of the month for keeping the coals heated up on these

stoves. I remember we had a good, warm place to get up, a good, warm place. They were good barracks, I mean, as far as . . .

Marcello: Were they made out of logs or tar paper or what?

Buck: No, I think they had siding on them, the best I remember-- just a . . . that's been a long time. But I think they were made with a . . . well, pretty well-built buildings.

Marcello: Now did you have a mixed group in this camp? In other words, were most of these boys from all over the country, also?

Buck: Yes, they were. I don't remember. I don't believe we had any blacks in that camp. I know we had some Mexicans, but I don't believe we had a black one in that camp.

Marcello: Were there any tensions here between the Mexicans and the Anglos?

Buck: Not as much. I didn't stay long enough to find out about it. But we didn't have the . . . there didn't seem to be.

Marcello: Did they segregate the Mexicans from the Anglos, or were you all in the same barracks?

Buck: All in the same barracks. There was no segregation in any of it, I mean, as far as . . . which I think . . . that was probably the starting of integration because (chuckle) . . . but it is one of . . . like I told you before, it was the greatest experience a country kid like I was could get. It would be an opportunity to

travel and to work and mix with other people like that. I've always said it would be the best thing if every boy, when he got sixteen or seventeen years old, could go for a six-months' hitch. I mean, it'd make a lot better boy out of him.

Marcello: Are there any other ways that you can think of that the CCC might have benefited you? Did you pick up any weight or anything while you were in the CCC?

Buck: Yes, I did. I gained weight. Due to being on a balanced diet and regular bedtime and everything that, normally you pick up . . . I don't remember how much, but I do know I gained some weight. I didn't grow any, though. That used to be my big problem. I was short.

Marcello: Was there a place close by this camp where you could . . . was there a town close by where you could go for recreation?

Buck: The nearest place to Vetran, I believe, was Cheyenne, and I never went there. Now they took some truckloads there one weekend while I was there, but I didn't go. That was during the Cheyenne Rodeo. We had the opportunity to . . . and I think one time they went to Yellowstone National Park.

Marcello: How come you didn't go?

Buck: I was sweating it out to come home then. I was waiting for an answer, and I didn't want to be gone if it come in.

Marcello: Was discipline a problem in this camp at all?

Buck: Quite a bit of trouble keeping them there, was the main thing. This friend and I one night, we just thought we'd have some fun. So we went down through those barracks. We had five of them, I believe it was. We told them all we was going over the hill and asked how many of them wanted to go. I think there was about twelve or fifteen of them got ready to go, and they went back . . . well, we didn't intend to go. But they went on--the ones that we tricked (chuckle).

Marcello: And you mentioned that when somebody did go over the hill, they usually weren't brought back. They were simply given a dishonorable discharge.

Buck: No, they weren't brought back. That's the only difference between getting out like I got out. I got an honorable discharge, and I got my fare paid home.

Marcello: From all of the things you said, I gather that you didn't like this camp here at Vetran very much.

Buck: I sure didn't.

Marcello: Why was that?

Buck: It was in a desert-like area. About the first or second day, we went on a work party, it come up a sand storm. A lot of them started running around behind a truck to get out of the sand, and when I caught that truck, electricity liked to knocked me loose from it--

electrical sand storm, I guess. From then on I didn't like it. I decided right then I wanted out of there.

Marcello: Were you perhaps getting homesick by this time?

Buck: No. I can truthfully say, I don't think the whole time I was in Arizona I got homesick. But I wanted out of that camp. You might call it homesick, but it was more to get away from the camp than it was to get home.

Marcello: How were the supervisors and so on in this camp? Did you ever have any trouble with them or anything?

Buck: No, I had no trouble whatsoever. We had, I guess, the Soil Conservation Service, and then we had leaders and assistant leaders, which were made up on CCC boys.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you were constructing irrigation canals here.

Buck: Yes, we were putting rock up on the sides of the banks to keep them from washing out.

Marcello: Who was benefiting from these irrigation canals?

Buck: I couldn't answer that. I don't know. I guess the ranchers in there because that was ranching country, and everything was scattered way out. I guess the ranchers were. About all I know about that camp is where the camp was and where we went to work. Anything outside of that area in there, I didn't know anything.

Marcello: How far was the project from where you lived?

Buck: It was just about a mile. We walked it a lot of times.

Marcello: What time of the year was it when you were there?

Buck: I believe it was in October.

Marcello: So it was beginning to get pretty cold at that time.

Buck: Yes, it was beginning to get cold there.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that you didn't like this camp and wanted to get out. How did you go about getting out of the CCC?

Buck: I wrote my parents and told them that if they didn't get me I was going over the hill. So what they had to do was find me a job back here at home that would pay as much or more than the CCC would pay me.

Marcello: This was a part of the rules and regulations?

Buck: That if you had a job at home better than that, you could get out with an honorable discharge at any time. So they found me one with . . . my brother-in-law had a dairy. So he told me he'd put me to work at a certain amount. When they got that signed statement back in there, why, they called me up. I told them I was ready to go. They give me ration money and a ticket on a train.

Marcello: Did they hassle you at all?

Buck: No, not a bit. There were a lot of guys in Vetran that went over the hill. I'd say, oh, probably 20 per cent of them that came in there went over the hill.

Marcello: Why was that? Was it that they didn't like the climate and the terrain, also?

Buck: Yes, and the work. It was hard work.

Marcello: And most of the work that was done there consisted of breaking these rocks.

Buck: Breaking rocks--that's just about it.

Marcello: Yes, I guess that would be a pretty tough thing to do eight hours a day.

Buck: Yes, it sure was. They made you walk out there and then back.

Marcello: In other words, that didn't count towards your actual working time.

Buck: No.

Marcello: You still spent eight hours on that rock pile.

Buck: Yes, and I didn't get to cook up there. I worked. That's probably why I quit. I did the light end of it, but it was work anyhow.

Marcello: When you came back to this area, did you, in fact, go to work for your brother-in-law?

Buck: No. He wasn't my brother-in-law then. He is now.

Marcello: I see.

Buck: No, I didn't go to work for him.

Marcello: In other words, they simply got him to sign for you or whatever.

Buck: To sign for me to get me out, to keep me from going over the hill. That's the main thing. My parents were always afraid of me catching a freight train or

anything. So when I told them I was coming home . . . I wrote them a letter and told them I was going over the hill. I got a telegram one day and an airmail letter the next day telling me to stay there until they did something. They didn't want me on that freight train (chuckle).

Marcello: Now you mentioned previously that while you were at Vetran, you were able to receive money.

Buck: Yes, you could get money back in there.

Marcello: Why was it . . . I wonder why there was a difference?

Buck: I guess it's a difference in the locality or the organization, or it may be the camp commander's own idea. I don't know.

Marcello: Incidentally, did any of these camps that you were in ever have any sort of an educational program?

Buck: No.

Marcello: I know that a lot of the camps had education programs where the CCC enrollees might be able to learn a trade or maybe take some additional high school or college courses or something of this nature.

Buck: No, at neither one of the camps they didn't have this.

Marcello: I guess they were probably too isolated to have something of that nature.

Buck: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, I think we can probably wrap up this interview by doing a little bit of summarizing at this point.

You mentioned awhile ago that the CCC experience, as you look back on it, was a pretty beneficial thing so far as you were concerned.

Buck: Yes.

Marcello: Suppose we were to have a depression today similar to the one that existed in the 1930's. Would you like to see another CCC established perhaps?

Buck: I think so. Even without a depression, I think it would be a good thing. I think it would be . . . that much training just gives a boy something that he don't get unless he's into it. I mean, you know, like going into the Army or something. Well, for some people it won't do any good. But a majority of people that are boys, I'll tell you, they'll get some good out of it.

Marcello: How did your CCC experience prepare you for the Army?

Buck: Well, it was that much military that we had and being in groups with people and mixing with them. See, I was starting out pretty young in life. I think I was just right at my seventeenth birthday, I think, nearly when I first went in. I'd never been . . . Fort Worth was as far away from home as I'd ever been. And you learn . . . a boy will learn to take orders, which a lot of the boys now don't, can't, or won't. I don't know which way to put it.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Buck, once more I want to thank you for taking the time to participate in our New Deal Project

for the Oral History Collection. This is your second time around now, since we had previously interviewed you concerning your experiences as a prisoner-of-war. Once more, I think you've said some very important and very invaluable things that scholars are going to be able to use someday.

Buck: Well, I hope so. I've enjoyed it a lot. After that prisoner-of-war interview, I didn't mind this time so bad (chuckle).