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Interview with
EDWARD JONES
November 15, 1987

Place of Interview: Kenner, Louisiana

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: Edward W. Jones Sr.
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Edward Jones

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello Date: November 15, 1987

Place of Interview: Kenner, Louisiana

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Edward Jones for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on November 15, 1987, in Kenner, Louisiana. I am interviewing Mr. Jones in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he served with the Civilian Conservation Corps, better known as the CCC, during the 1930s.

Mr. Jones, even though you participated in our project before, when we interviewed you concerning your experiences at Pearl Harbor, I still need to get some biographical information. Obviously, some people who read this interview will not have read that first interview, so they wouldn't have that kind of information. Very briefly, give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born and where you were born, first of all.

Jones: I was born on July 14, 1920, in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Marcello: Okay, tell me a little bit about your education.

Jones: My education was grammar school, or grade school, and a little high school.

Marcello: If you were born in 1920, and the stock market crash occurred in 1929, and very shortly after that the Depression occurred, you were perhaps nine or ten or eleven years old when all of this took place.

Jones: Nine.

Marcello: You were nine years old?

Jones: I was nine when the crash hit.

Marcello: Could you describe for me how the Great Depression affected your family?

Jones: Well, they were affected by the Depression, but my situation is a little different from what you might expect me to say. My mother died when I was about six years old, and my father deserted me, and I was raised in an orphan's home. But I did have something to eat and a place to sleep, while the rest of my schoolmates were eating potatoes and sometimes just the peelings. So it didn't affect me to where I didn't have something to eat or a place to sleep. I stayed in that orphan's home from 1929--is when I went in it--and I got out in 1935.

Marcello: What was the job situation when you got out of that orphanage in 1935?

Jones: Well, it was still hanging over from the Depression, and there was no jobs unless you had real good skills. Most of the people that did have jobs learned from their fathers or their uncles, and no one would teach it. You couldn't go in as an apprentice. No one wanted to lose any money while you learned your trade, and that was a bad situation. Today they have all these trade schools and loans for college and stuff like that.

Marcello: What kinds of jobs could you find at that time, if anything at all? What were some of the various kinds of things that you did to make a buck?

Jones: Well, you're talking about when I was old enough to work?

Marcello: I'm talking about after you got out of that orphanage, which was in 1935.

Jones: I was still fifteen, almost sixteen, year old; and when I was seventeen, the first job I got was working in a dairy. They had an ice cream stand, serving sodas and ice cream. I made eleven cents an hour, and I worked ten hours a day with no overtime. So I got about eleven dollars a week for seventy hours work. That was my first job.

During that time they had all kinds of organizations that were supposed to help poor people. I worked on the WPA (Works Progress Administration); I worked on the PWA (Public Works Administration); I worked with the NYA

(National Youth Administration). Then I went into the CCC.

Marcello: Why was it that you did not continue to work with either the WPA or the PWA during that period?

Jones: Well, I just decided to go in the CCC.

Marcello: I see. In the meantime, where were you staying, since you were only making eleven dollars a week?

Jones: Well, my father did come back into town when I was. .at that time, as I told you, I was almost sixteen. Then we got out of the orphanage, and I stayed with him.

Marcello: You say "we. There were some other brothers or sisters involved?

Jones: Me and my two brothers, who were also in this orphan's home.

Marcello: So you, in essence, did at least have free board at that time, then? Or free room, perhaps?

Jones: Right, right. I had something to eat and a place to stay. Then when I got out of the CCC, I went into the Navy.

Marcello: Well, let's talk about these various New Deal programs for which you worked. Let me ask you this question, first of all. At that time, what did Franklin Roosevelt mean to the people of America?

Jones: Well, he didn't completely solve the problem, but he helped a lot. And the CCC camps did two things. It was like a dual purpose thing. It gave the mothers and

fathers something to buy bread and butter with, and it kept the young boys off the streets. It kept them from getting in trouble.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that Roosevelt also kind of made people feel good about themselves, or maybe he instilled a certain amount of confidence or self-respect once again?

Jones: Well, he gave us a chance to work. Like I said, nobody would hire me before. Everybody wanted someone with experience. I didn't have any I said, "How do you expect me to get some?" "That's your problem; we're not going to take care of you until you learn how. That's what everybody told me.

Marcello: Generally speaking--now, of course, you were very young at the time--what was the general economic situation in the New Orleans area?

Jones: Well, nobody ever had any money, but the prices were cheap, as you know. Like you say, you could get porterhouse steak for twenty-five cents a pound. But, really, it averages out with today's buying power. Things was ten times cheaper then, but we made ten times less money. Today thing are ten times more expensive, but we make ten times more money. It kind of averages out. But people have it better today due to the fact that the banks are not allowed to fail as in 1929.

Marcello: I know that a lot of young people decided to take off

and, to use the term, "ride the rods" or hitch a freight train and just go wherever the freight train went and see some things and maybe even find some work. Did that thought ever cross your mind?

Jones: Never. In my area I never saw any young men do it. I saw fathers do it. In fact, my father-in-law rode the trains as far as to Chicago in trying to get jobs and stuff like that. You know, there's a difference between a hobo and a bum. One don't want to work, and one's looking for work.

Marcello: And he would have been classified as a hobo.

Jones: He did it. He did it. But the young men didn't normally do that. They'd run and join something--try to get in the service or whatever they could get in.

Marcello: You mentioned that you first of all started working for the WPA, which was the Works Progress Administration.

Jones: Right.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you got on the WPA.

Jones: Oh, it's just like applying if you're unemployed. It's like the unemployment bureau, and you apply for whatever you can get. They paved streets and worked on "neutral grounds" (medians) Like, on Canal Boulevard--on all big thoroughfares--they had canals. We would cover the canals and put mud on top and plant flowers and pave streets and even build some little bridges and things like that.

Marcello: Did you have to prove need before you could get on the WPA?

Jones: You had to show that you was unemployed.

Marcello: Was there any politics involved in getting on the WPA? I know that in some areas you had to vote for the right candidate or be a member of the right party in order to get in the WPA.

Jones: Not that I know of, not in my situation.

Marcello: Where did you join the WPA?

Jones: Right here in New Orleans.

Marcello: What kind of particular work were you doing? Do you remember?

Jones: Well, they would class you as the laborer whether you used a shovel or a rake. It was jut manual labor work--no title to it.

Marcello: What kind of wages were you getting? That's going back a long way, and perhaps that's an unfair question. But I'll ask it, anyhow.

Jones: Well, I think it was about, as close as I can remember, a dollar a day.

Marcello: I've heard some people say that one had a better chance of getting credit if one were connected with one of these government work programs because merchants and so one knew that such a person would have a steady income, even if it was a small one. Did you find that to be the case?

Jones: Not really, because credit in those days wasn't like it is today. In fact, nobody would want to give any credit at all, unless you lived in a little neighborhood and you went to the grocery store and they had the little ledger book and you could charge it until payday. That's the only credit. They probably had credit for people who had good jobs and wages, but the normal poor guy didn't have any credit at all.

Marcello: How long did you remain with the WPA?

Jones: I can't remember. Like I say, there were four organizations that I worked for. It was a couple of years.

Marcello: What prompted you to go from the WPA to the PWA, which was the Public Works Administration?

Jones: It probably was that some jobs would run out, and then you go from one to another.

Marcello: Do you recall what kind of work you were doing with the PWA?

Jones: That was the same type as the WPA.

Marcello: That's interesting because I was always under the impression that the PWA did larger jobs than the small ones that the WPA did.

Jones: I really can't remember which one was the largest. A lot of people would confuse the PWA with the WPA. They thought it was the same thing.

Marcello: And then you mentioned that you also worked for a time

with the NYA. Now how did that employment come about?

Jones: That was for a young man just getting out of school or who didn't complete their schooling. It's called the National Youth Administration. They gave us a dollar a day, too.

Marcello: And what kind of work did you do with the NYA?

Jones: That type of work was construction work. They were supposed to teach a trade. Now, like, they would have an old school that hadn't been used in twenty-five years--rundown, needed some masonry work, plumbing, electrical, painting. They would say, "Well, you can be the painter. This was supposed to teach me how to paint. Then they had boys--I say boys because they were still teenagers--learning to be electricians. We actually renovated that whole school and did a beautiful job with no charge except for our wages.

Marcello: And did the NYA make a sincere effort to teach you a trade?

Jones: No, no. It was probably just something like welfare, you know. Just welfare really don't. It feeds you, but it don't let you advance anyplace, you know. With generation after generation on welfare, you're helping them and feeding them, but they need to learn a trade.

Marcello: You worked for the WPA and the PWA and the NYA. How did you feel about taking those jobs? In other words, you mentioned that the Works Progress Administration was

perhaps comparable to what welfare is today. How did you feel about taking those kinds of jobs, whether it was with the WPA or the PWA or the NYA?

Jones: Menial jobs.

Marcello: Well, not only a menial job, but, you know, these were government programs and so on. How did you feel about taking jobs like that?

Jones: Well, I'm not proud. I'm not saying that. In those days, in fact, I'll do anything. I'm not above anything. In fact, as I told you, I wasn't used to having anything, anyway, since my mother died. We never really had anything, anyway. I could tell you some things, too, but it really doesn't apply to this interview. I don't know if I should or not. Even when we was in this orphan's home, they had a lot of money to take care of the orphans, but the superintendent put the money in his bank account, and we didn't get anything to eat there. We had to go to bed hungry. He did it the six years I was there. They did catch him and send him to prison, but it didn't help us. We didn't have anything. And I wouldn't really say I "missed" the good life, because I didn't have any.

Marcello: Also, is it safe to say that since many people were in the same situation, this perhaps made it easier psychologically to take one of these jobs?

Jones: Very true. Everybody was in my situation, except a few

that had good jobs, and there wasn't too many of them.

Marcello: How much competition was there at that time to get on the WPA or the PWA or the NYA?

Jones: Well, I don't know. I guess there was a very large. They must have had room for everybody. I don't remember anybody being turned down.

Marcello: As you look back on some of those projects that the WPA and the PWA constructed, do you think that they were socially useful and that there were benefits to be derived from them, or, on the other hand, do you think they were simply "make work" projects?

Jones: No, they repaved streets, and they built bridges. Until this day in Louisiana, you can go all over south Louisiana, and you'll see bridges built by the CCC, and they're just as good as new. They were built better than they are today.

Marcello: Did the CCC build bridges, too?

Jones: Right, like, right over canals. Not no big bridges. We built drainage ditches and things like that. We cleaned canals.

Marcello: Well, let's talk about the CCC, then, since this is the agency with which you had the most experience. First of all, why did you decide to join the Civilian Conservation Corps?

Jones: Well, for one reason, as I had told you before, my daddy had come back to town. It's a long story. He didn't

really accept us boys. He took us, but he didn't really take care of us. He didn't want us, and we didn't want to be where we wasn't wanted, so I'd go anywhere, like, the CCC. But, like, the Navy, I wanted to be in the Navy, anyway. I would go from one place to the next just to be out on my own and have a place to sleep and eat.

But I'll tell you what the CCC did for me, and not only me but for everyone that was in there. They taught us discipline. In fact, at the end of World War II, some general made a statement that because all of the fellows that were in the CCC went in the services, we were well-disciplined and knew how to take orders. It helped a lot in their boot camp because they were already used to taking orders. Like, some of these rich boys who had everything they wanted and had new cars, we weren't used to that; and we just took it, and we did anything they told us to do.

Marcello: In other words, being in the CCC helped ease the transition from civilian to military life.

Jones: Right. Every CCC boy did.

Marcello: I gather from what you said, then, that one thing that influenced you to join the CCC was the fact that you could get away from home.

Jones: Right.

Marcello: And I use that term, "home, loosely in your case.

Jones: Right, true.

Marcello: Okay, describe.

Jones: My brothers were the same way.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you enlisted in the CCC, because that's what you did--you enlisted.

Jones: You had to be seventeen. I think twenty-four or twenty-six was the age limit.

Marcello: So your age had to be from seventeen to twenty-five or twenty-six.

Jones: And you didn't need your mother's and father's permission. Who ran the CCC was the Army and the Navy--the military. We had one lieutenant, and we had an ensign.

Marcello: How did you get into the CCC? How did the process take place?

Jones: I don't remember how I got the information to go join. It may have been in the paper or what. But it was just like joining the service. You go down to city hall, and you take an examination--no written examination, just a physical. Then they'll just send you to some CCC camp.

Marcello: You mentioned this off the record, and I want to get it on the record for a specific reason which I'll show you later on. How much did you weigh at the time that you entered the CCC?

Jones: I weighed 107 pounds.

Marcello: And you were 5'7 1/2" tall?

Jones: Right.

Marcello: And as you mentioned, you did have to take a physical examination.

Jones: Right, I had to take a physical.

Marcello: When was it that they issued you your special clothing? You did have uniforms.

Jones: Right. Just right away.

Marcello: What kind of uniforms did you have? Do you remember?

Jones: Yes, we had Army uniforms. We had what they called ODs and khakis. We wore the heavy woolen in the winter, and we had those little. I don't know what the Army's term is for these caps. Not garrison caps. Garrison caps had the peaks. It's the one that.

Marcello: The overseas cap?

Jones: The little cap like the VFW wears.

Marcello; I think they're called overseas caps.

Jones: I don't know. But we dressed just like the Army.

Marcello: How about when you went on the job? What kind of a work uniform did you have? Weren't they kind of a blue denim or something?

Jones: It was. It was the blue denims, which we called dungarees. When we went out, we were in the drainage division.

Marcello: Well, let me just back up here a second. So you take your physical, and you get your uniforms. Did they give you anything else like shoes or anything like that?

Jones: Well, Army shoes and that's it.

Marcello: How long was the enlistment for?

Jones: Six months.

Marcello: You signed up for six months.

Jones: Right. Every six months you can reenlist.

Marcello: Now, theoretically, the way it was set up is that you were supposed to fulfill that enlistment, isn't that correct?

Jones: True. You were sworn in like you do in the service.

Marcello: If you didn't fulfill that enlistment, what was supposed to happen to you? What would you get?

Jones: A dishonorable discharge.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. What social stigma did a dishonorable discharge have at that time?

Jones: Not much to civilian life. But you couldn't join the military or you couldn't get a federal job if you had a dishonorable discharge.

Marcello: I suspect, however, that if some civilian employer found out that you had a dishonorable discharge from the CCC, he might have hesitated to employ you.

Jones: It wouldn't help you any at all.

Marcello: Okay, so you sign up for six months.

Jones: Six months.

Marcello: Where do you go, and how do you get there?

Jones: Well, they had Army trucks just like the troops used, and they just took you to. .well, it depends on where

they want to send you. If they send you to Oregon or California, which some of them did. they sent me to Thibodaux, Louisiana.

Marcello: If you went to California or Oregon, you would probably go by train.

Jones: Train, yes.

Marcello: In your case, you went by truck.

Jones: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, was this camp located on the outskirts of Thibodaux?

Jones: About six blocks outside of town and in a sugar cane plantation. .right in the middle of a sugar cane plantation.

Marcello: Okay, take me on a tour of this CCC camp. Suppose you and I were entering this CCC camp. Describe the kinds of buildings we would see. Give me the physical layout of the camp.

Jones: Well, it looks just like an Army camp. They have barracks. We had four big barracks, and I would say there were fifty to the barracks. We had a big mess hall to serve you breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The meals were pretty good. I have to give them that. We had a dispensary, and if you got seriously sick, they sent you to the hospital in New Orleans. They had, like, a big tool house with a lot of shovels and rakes and working things. They had a garage where they had

trucks--Army trucks--that would take you out into the swamps to work every morning.

Marcello: Who ran the camp on the inside?

Jones: Well, the commanding officers were two commissioned officers--an ensign and a second lieutenant. Sometimes there was a first lieutenant.

Marcello: You did have an ensign in that camp?

Jones: Right.

Marcello: So there was a Navy officer and an Army officer.

Jones: Right.

Marcello: ..and then some enlisted personnel?

Jones: No enlisted personnel.

Marcello: Just an Army officer and a Navy officer?

Jones: Right. See, it was run by the War Department.

Marcello: Take me inside the barracks where you stayed. What was the inside of one of the barracks like?

Jones: Well, it was a regular big Army barracks. There's a door on each end and an aisle in the middle with bunks on each side and lockers--wooden lockers--and you could have a footlocker at the foot of your bed. Right in the middle, there was a big potbelly stove for burning wood. One man was assigned to get up an half an hour before reveille and get the barracks warm so when you got up it wouldn't be too cold.

Marcello: Would the Army hold periodic inspections of the barracks?

Jones: You mean the lieutenant?

Marcello: Yes.

Jones: Oh, yes. Every Saturday, I think it was. The beds had to be made, and they would have locker inspections, and everything had to be just so or you wouldn't get any .I call it liberty. You couldn't go to town.

Marcello: You were mentioning the mess hall awhile ago, and you made some comments about the CCC chow. Who served as cooks?

Jones: Like, if you was in the service, they would have a cook, and he's the cook all of the time. I don't know how they went about getting someone that knew how to cook, but they did.

Marcello: Would they get some of the CCC enrollees to serve as KPs?

Jones: Yes, we did. We all did. There wasn't any cooking involved, but we all did KP. There was an ol' boy over us who told us what to do.

Marcello: Compare the food that you received at that CCC camp with the food that you had been eating either in the orphanage or when you were living with your father.

Jones; Well, it was a lot better than a normal young man my age was getting by not being in the CCC camp.

Marcello: What might be a typical meal? Let's start with breakfast.

Jones: Well, they'd have, like, cereal, fried eggs and bacon,

and ham and stuff like that. Typical meals would be, like, stew, red beans and rice, sometimes chicken. It was like being in the service.

Marcello: These latter meals that you described would probably be your evening meal?

Jones: Midday and...but when we were working. .I don't know if you want me to say this. On a normal or typical day, reveille blew; you got dressed and washed up; and then, say, about thirty minutes from reveille, chow would blow. You'd go eat breakfast, and then about a half-hour later, work call sounded. Everyone got in their trucks, and the drivers would drive us to the swamps. The noontime meal would come. These pick-up trucks would come out with these big pots with the noon meal. We all had mess kits, canteens, and we would eat in the fields.

Marcello: What would the noon meal usually consist of?

Jones: Well, it was sort of like if you was back in camp.

Marcello: Would there perhaps be more sandwiches and things like that, or would there always be something hot?

Jones: No, no, it was hot--always hot. We never had sandwiches except, like, Sunday evenings--like being in the service. They would serve cold cuts. Most of the time on Sunday evenings, people wasn't there, anyway, so they wouldn't cook a meal. They would want to go to town and walk around and do what they had to do.

Marcello: And what would the evening meal, then, usually consist of?

Jones: Just sort of like the normal meal like we would have when we wasn't in the field.

Marcello: Were you getting more meats and vegetables there than what you got in the orphanage or at home?

Jones: Oh, yes. Right, right. We went to bed hungry in the orphanage. It was a shame.

Marcello: How about the quantity of the food there in the CCC?

Jones: They had everything. They had enough to eat, and in fact, they threw a lot of it away.

Marcello: In other words, you had all you wanted?

Jones: Right, right, right.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. When you got out of the CCC, what did you weigh?

Jones: I weighed about 125 pounds and close to 130 pounds.

Marcello: So you picked up around twenty to twenty-five pounds while you were in the CCC?

Jones: Yes, in one year. I was close to 130 pounds.

Marcello: That's why I asked you awhile ago how much you weighed when you went in.

Jones: I'll tell you another reason, too. The work was so hard that it made you hungry, and you wanted to eat that food.

Marcello: What kind of work were you doing?

Jones: My department of the CCC camp was called the drainage

division, and we drained bayous. These water lillies, they have a name. Their real name is water hyacinth. They grow so thick and so fast. Then they got what they call alligator grass that grows with them and weaves them together like a big mat, and it stops the flow of the bayou, and all the fish die. It gets stagnated, and nothing flows. So it was our job to keep this drainage moving.

Marcello: And how do you go about doing this? What is involved?

Jones: Well, we had these tools that looked something like a pitchfork, and it had a handle about twelve feet long. A man would go in a skiff right in the middle with a big chopper and chop it. Then we would all get in a big row--it could be half a block long, 150 yards--and we would all throw out the pitchforks and grab it, and we would pull it in. We would actually roll it up like a carpet, and when it would get to the bank, it would be about four or five feet high--as high as our heads sometimes. There was these big rolls like you see alfalfa in the fields sometimes. We would roll it a little bit, and some other guy would hold it while we got another one up and roll it. Then the fish, alligators, turtles, snakes, and everything would run back into the water again as we would be rolling it out.

I also had another job. Since I could play a trumpet, I took the job as a bugler. Most buglers don't

have to go out. I found out later that they don't go out in the field and work, but for three dollars a month extra, I blew the bugle. I also had to get up a half-hour early to blow the bugle. I'd blow the mess call, work call, taps at night. They had bed check and everything. But that was three dollars a month extra.

Marcello: Who supervised the CCC men when they were out on the job?

Jones: Well, we didn't come to that yet. We had said something about enlisted men. They had leaders and assistant leaders. I forgot exactly. I think the assistant leader got five or six dollars a month. We only had one leader, and each barracks had an assistant leader. They would take care of the barracks. Whatever had to be done, the leader told him, and he told the men, and they had to do it.

Marcello: But the supervisory people came from the CCC ranks?

Jones: Right.

Marcello: You had no civilian supervisors at all?

Jones: We had one civilian supervisor who knew the swamps and what had to be done. In fact, no one that wasn't living in this area could know what had to be done. We would go, say, like, to plantation to plantation and work around these plantations. He was a civilian, but I don't know what he was paid. He was paid by the government.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that the CCC supervisor got five dollars a month. You mean five dollars a month more over and above what his normal CCC pay was.

Jones: Right.

Marcello: And was this the job that you worked on most of the time while you were in the CCC?

Jones: Well, most of the time we were draining these bayous. We would also have to dig some ditches, too.

Marcello: Is it accurate to say that this was probably a continuous job. In other words, by the time so much time had passed, you might have to go back and start all over again?

Jones: True, true. Very true. With these water hyacinths, they grow so fast, and it's still a problem to the bayous today. They've been trying to find out how to get rid of this problem. At one time they developed a chopper to chop them up in little bitty pieces, but the bulb blowed. They have hundreds, maybe thousands, of seeds, and they would grow from one to a thousand. So that didn't work at all. I really don't know how they're working it out today--how they're keeping it clean without the CCC boys (chuckle)

Marcello: I do know that a lot of these CCC camps had small libraries, or some of them even had night classes where people could perhaps take math courses or science courses or perhaps could even learn some sort of a

trade. Did this camp at Thibodaux have anything like that?

Jones: No, they didn't have anything like that. If they did, I don't remember them having anything like that. We also had a fellow that. .he must have known radio already, but we did have a radio shack. He knew Morse code. I don't know what his job was, but he was the radioman.

Marcello: Did the enrollees have to engage in military formalities such as saluting and things of that nature?

Jones: No, but we did have the flag raising and lowering in the day. We didn't have to salute.

Marcello: What was the ethnic make-up of this camp? Was everybody white?

Jones: Right. Everybody was white.

Marcello: Were there ever any problems concerning theft or anything like that in these camps?

Jones: Very, very seldom. If they did catch someone--somebody stealing a pair of shoes or something--they'd give them a dishonorable discharge. In my time I think they caught one man stealing.

Marcello: Describe how the CCC leave policies or liberty policies were organized. In other words, when could you leave camp and go to town perhaps or maybe even go home?

Jones: Well, every other weekend. They had the camp divided into halves. You could have one weekend, and the next week you had to stay in. Then the next weekend you

could go out. Because fires could break out, and your barracks could burn down and everything like that.

Marcello: When you had liberty, where would you usually go?

Jones: Well, we were six blocks from this little town. I would say it was six blocks square.

Marcello: Now is this Thibodaux?

Jones: Thibodaux. This is exactly what they had. They had two theaters owned by the same man; they had two dance places that we could dance at; and they had a few service stations and maybe five places to get something to eat. And that was it.

Marcello: So what would you normally do, then, when you went into town?

Jones: Practically nothing except just get out of camp and walk around. No one really had, like, steady girls. In fact, they didn't have any money to spend on them, anyway. But the dances were real cheap, like, twenty-five or fifty cents. It was a pretty big dance hall. The girls would dance with you and everything like that.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what kind of a reception the CCC enrollees received from the local townspeople.

Jones: It wasn't like the Army before the war, or the Navy: "No sailors or dogs on the lawn, stuff like that. The little money that we did have, we did spend in Thibodaux. There was another town about fifteen miles away. Some of the boys lived there. I'd say 50 percent

of my camp was the French Cajun boys that lived in the bayous, and 50 percent of us was from New Orleans.

Marcello: Did that cause any problems, or did everybody get along pretty well?

Jones: It did cause problems with some. Not with me. I don't know...maybe some of the so-called city slickers might have thought they were better than these guys out in the country with no education and couldn't speak too well, anyway. But I got along very well. I liked both of them, and some of my best friends were French Cajuns. But they would separate during working hours. The French would speak French all day, and if I was with them, I couldn't get in any conversation. I tried to pick up some words. The English, they would stick to their side. I thought maybe I'd learn French, but I didn't.

Marcello: Did they segregate the barracks according to the Anglos and the Cajuns?

Jones: No, no. We were all mixed up--all together.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about your pay. What was your total pay per month?

Jones: Well, my share was five dollars a month, and they sent home twenty-five dollars. Out of that they had, like, canteen books that you could use to buy personal articles and snacks. We did have a canteen. It had one or maybe two pool tables and maybe a radio to play, and

then they had like the little small stores where you could buy different things, mostly cigarettes, gum and candy, and maybe a little sandwich between meals and stuff. All the money that was taken was just used for the canteen to buy sports equipment for the men. We did play baseball and football.

Marcello: Would you compete against some of the town teams or something?

Jones: We would compete against other CCC camps that were close, like, the one in Lafayette. The closest one I know was Lafayette. They had some around Baton Rouge. We'd get in the trucks, and we'd go. Pitching horse-shoes--we had teams for that--and different. .anything to do something.

Marcello: Would most of the athletic contests take place on Saturdays?

Jones: Probably, yes. But it wasn't nothing big. It was something to do. We didn't have any leagues or won so many or lost so many.

Marcello: This may be a personal question, but I'll ask it, anyhow. What happened to the twenty-five dollars that you sent home?

Jones: They kept that. Most mothers and fathers needed it. Well, it really wasn't even enough, but that's the way it went.

Marcello: What happened in the case of your twenty-five dollars?

Did it go home to your father?

Jones: Right. And I had a stepmother at the time.

Marcello: I do know that in some cases.

Jones: And they were very hard to get along with (chuckle). But I got along better than my two brothers could. You know, I'm reserved and they're not, and they don't get along too well.

Marcello: Even though they were hard to get along with, I gather they still had no problems about taking that twenty-five dollars and using it.

Jones: No, no. They had no problems. They shouldn't have took anything, but they did.

Marcello: You reenlisted for another six months. Why did you decide to do that?

Jones: Well, in my case there really wasn't nothing else to do. Then after the second six months, I decided to go back home and that I'd work for my father. He owned an automobile glass installing business, and I worked with him for a while. Then I joined the Navy.

Marcello: What kind of pay were you receiving from him?

Jones: Five bucks a week (chuckle). I had my room and board and five bucks a week.

Marcello: When you went into the CCC for that second enlistment.

Jones: I just stayed, you know. I didn't move.

Marcello: .what kind of work were you doing? Was it the same thing?

Jones: Same thing. We really didn't ever accomplish too much because everything we did we had to go do over again. Except for, like, the small. .they do have some bridges and things that are still in perfect shape today.

Marcello: Did you help build some of the bridges?

Jones: I didn't work on the concrete work. But that was fifty years ago, and they're still in good shape.

Marcello: You mentioned this awhile ago. .I'm sorry. Go ahead. You were going to ask me something.

Jones: I was just going to say, the areas that we went into were very remote, and if we didn't have guides, we would never be able to get out. The fellows that were born and raised in those bayous and everything knew that area, and they drove the trucks. Sometimes the roads was almost unbearable to get into and out of, and we would go fifteen miles in the swamps and work all day. It was common to, say, like, kill fifty snakes in one day. When I first went there, I wasn't used to any snakes, and the first time I went out--I don't know how many--I killed twenty or thirty snakes. I would dream about them, and I was scared of them and everything else. But after you're out there working a while, if you see them you don't worry about them. It's the ones that you don't see that you may step on. Most of the snakes will run away from you. They do have a blind season. I don't know what time of the year--autumn or

what--but they shed, and they get blind. They can't see you coming, and that's the dangerous part we used to have to watch for. Like I say, they will run away from you. We used to see alligators and loggerhead turtles as big as a washtub with heads bigger than a basketball. We'd also see snapping turtles. We didn't have anyplace to swim--no swimming pools--so on our lunch hour we would swim in the bayous. That was very dangerous. They had alligator nests there; they had the loggerhead turtles. It was about four feet deep, and they had about three feet of sediment with straw where they kept their nests--the turtles. We didn't know if we were going to jump in one of those nests or not. In fact, we'd even be able to catch the alligators in the same place. We'd bring them back to the camp. Our supervisor lived in Thibodaux. I think he was the head man. He stayed at his house, and he'd be catching turtles all day, and fish. He'd take the alligators home and eat them, too. He was doing pretty good.

And all these plantations where we were draining ditches, they would come out and give him sacks of potatoes and all kinds of vegetables. He'd bring them home. He was doing pretty good.

Marcello: So all the plantations in the area were actually benefiting from these drainage ditches.

Jones: Right. That was the main purpose of everything.

Marcello: These were probably the same people who were voting Republican (chuckle).

Jones: They wasn't voting Republican because we didn't have any Republicans up until just a few years ago. We still don't have but, I would say, about 30 percent now.

Marcello: Let me ask you a speculative-type question. Suppose we were to have another depression of the magnitude of the one that we had back in the 1930s. How would you feel about the government organizing another CCC?

Jones: I think they should do it right now. There's too many kids on the street today. They should find something for them kids to do because they're going to get in trouble. They're already in trouble. I didn't have to tell you that. You know, the police departments have these recreation centers to keep them off the streets. The government should. I think that should be done right this very minute.

Marcello: As we look back over this interview, I can think of two things that the CCC seemed to have done for you. I think, first of all, it improved your health physically. Is that correct?

Jones: Right.

Marcello: And the second thing if did, which is something that you previously mentioned, is that it helped ease your transition from civilian life into the military.

Jones: True. It helped me a lot because these fellows who were

just coming in, especially after the war started, from their mamas and daddies didn't know what it was to be ordered around, to do things they didn't want to do. We'd known that all of our lives, so that was no problem. They wanted to go home to Mama all the time. We really didn't have anyplace to go to, really, that we were welcome to, anyway. We messed around in New Orleans and everything, but it wasn't like running home to mother.

Marcello; Would it also be accurate to say that the CCC helped you to get a little self-respect? In other words, you were doing something that was socially useful, and you were putting in a hard day's work, and you were getting paid for it.

Jones: Not like being on welfare. It's one of the hardest jobs I had in my life--it really was. I mean, they really worked you, too. It wasn't no "goldbricking, as they call it. No way! When we dug a ditch, they lined you up. They gave you so many feet--one man here, one man here--and when this man behind you got to you, you better be gone and get another spot to dig in. We had ditches as deep as eight feet deep in hauling that stuff out of there.

They had a little incident that. .we all never did like to be near snakes, but when there was one near you, you wanted to either get him out, or they had. .one of

my CCC guys took a shovel, and he cut this snake's head off. This is a very odd thing, and that's the reason I'm telling you. He put the snake's head in the shovel. .and he could still bite you after you cut his head off. A turtle can, too, you know. He wanted to throw it out, and it just accidentally rolled down the handle, and it bit him on the hand. We sent him to the hospital.

Marcello: Did you have very many incidents with snakebite?

Jones: That's the only one that I can recall. But they were around all the time, and they were those water moccasins or cottonmouths. They had a few rattlers, but they were in the timber and not really in the water. But we would watch them; we had our eye on them.

I could tell you, too, that we had a few "nuts" in the camp that should have had psychiatric treatment. They would do such things as nail your shoes to the floor; or they'd put snakes in your locker, and when you open up the locker, there's a snake in there. I didn't think that was too funny, though. We did have a lot of mosquitoes out in the swamps, too.

Marcello: I should have asked you this earlier, before you went into the CCC, that is, before you actually got to the camp and so on. Did they give you any kind of inoculations or anything of that nature?

Jones: I think they did.

Marcello: You mentioned this before, but maybe we can close the interview at this point. When your enlistment was finished, what did you receive?

Jones: An honorable discharge.

Marcello: You did receive an honorable discharge?

Jones: That's correct.

Marcello: And it's been very similar to the discharge paper that you would get from the service [examines Mr. Jones's document].

Jones: They would let you go home every other weekend, but since nobody had any money, they would hitchhike. Like I say, at midnight they had bed check, and you better be in your bed or you'll be in trouble. You could go home on Friday night and come back on Sunday evening. So I would hitchhike in and hitchhike back. I would actually stay at my father's house and come back in. So one day I was hitchhiking back in. About eighteen miles from the camp, there's a little town called Riceland. And you take a ride as far as you can get. Well, I got to Riceland, and in those days at 8:30 all the lights went out in town. Everything closed up, and everybody went to bed. I was stuck in Riceland, and I had to be back in camp by midnight. So I had to run back to camp. It was 8:30, and I had eighteen miles to go, and I got in camp at midnight. I say "walk, but I would run, say, like, a hundred steps and then walk a hundred. I made

it. I got that eighteen miles, and then we still had to go half a mile back to the camp to check in.

Marcello: I was going to ask you this earlier, too. You may not know the answer to it. I'm assuming that the CCC camp bought a lot of its supplies on the local market?

Jones: I would imagine that because it would be fresh vegetables and things like that. I would imagine that.

Marcello: That would have probably been a stimulant to the local economy, then, too. So I'm thinking that those towns would probably want a CCC camp close by.

Jones: Probably. Just the little money that we did have in those days, they appreciated that, too.

Marcello: Well, I think we've more or less captured the essence of your experiences with the CCC, and once more, Mr. Jones, I want to thank you for having participated in our project. This is a whole lot different from talking about Pearl Harbor, but, nevertheless, I feel that this is also an important part of American history, and I'm glad that you've taken time to share these experiences with me.