

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM: Civilian Conservation Corps Project

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INTERVIEWEE *Robert [unclear]*
DATE *July 24, 1982*
INTERVIEWER *Janda Ruth Pui*
DATE *July 24, 1982*

OTIS BUTLER

7/24/82

Interviewer: Linda Ruth Pine

- Q. What is your name, please? Tell me a little bit about yourself.
- A. Otis Butler. I was raised in Fordyce, Arkansas. I was born October 20, 1894. My parents were Marion and Alda Butler. There were four children, two boys and two girls, two of them died. My brother was younger and my two sisters were older than me.
- Q. How much education did you have before you entered the CCC?
- A. The fifth grade - I jumped out the window at school at Fordyce and quit school!
- Q. How old were you when you entered the CCC?
- A. I was 39 years old.
- Q. How did you learn about the CCC?
- A. I was out of work and couldn't find any job. I went to town to see a fellow about the CCC and he said he could get me in there. I went right on in. That was during the Depression.
- Q. What was your family's financial situation at the time of your enlistment?
- A. My father had died. One of my sisters was a nurse, the other one never had a job.
- Q. When and where did you enlist in the CCC?
- A. I came to Little Rock and signed in and went to Petit Jean, in 1933.
- Q. When did you leave the CCC?
- A. I was in four months, and was discharged October 10, 1933. I had a baby to be born at that time and had to come home.
- Q. What kind of training did you receive there?
- A. We drilled. I worked out on the mountain building rock steps. We took exercise and drilled just like we were in the army. They stopped that though. This captain we had, John R. Reed, Jr., he was a rough old cuss and they finally got rid of him and got another, named Shelton. He was a fine guy.
- Q. What did you do in the camp when you weren't working?
- A. We prowled around over that mountain a whole lot, go to dances and things down in Carter Bottom. We had a bathtub at Cedar Creek where we would take a bath. We worked most of the time.
- Q. Did they provide any kind of recreational activities, or was it kind of up to you to provide your own recreation when you weren't working?
- A. We were on our own most of the time.
- Q. Did the camp you were at have educational opportunities other than job training?
- A. No, just working.
- Q. Did you ever attend college?
- A. No, mam.
- Q. What sort of recreational facilities did the camp have? Basketball? Tennis?
- A. We didn't have any of that.

- Q. What was camp life like - describe a day at camp.
- A. Camp life wasn't bad. We got our clothes, our food, a place to stay, in a tent. We were the first ones up there to start building that camp. We put up a tent in a cotton field and stayed in that a good while. We got up early, at six or seven. The food was good, they fed us pretty well.
- Q. How did you feel about being away from home?
- A. I didn't like that much. I had a child and another one being born and that kind of had me upset.
- Q. Did you correspond with your family and friends when you were away from home?
- A. Yes, but I don't think I kept any letters.
- Q. How did the family feel about you being in the Corps?
- A. They were glad to be getting something to eat. I was making a dollar a day and sending it to them. They could live then on a dollar a day. You couldn't do that now!
- Q. Was the training you received in the Corps of any use to you after you got out of the Corps?
- A. No, just what I already knew, that's about it.
- Q. Was the living experience of any use to you later, the camp life?
- A. I had been in the army, it was about the same thing except you weren't trying to kill somebody, just make a living.
- Q. What did you do during WW11?
- A. I worked as a guard on the city water works. And then I came back and worked for the Fordyce Lumber Company.
- Q. Where and when did you meet your wife?
- A. At Peca, Texas. We will be married 55 years in August. We had three children.
- Q. I understand Congress has recently passed a bill to reinstitute the CCC. How do you feel about this? What do you see as its contribution to our society in the 1980's?
- A. I think it was a pretty nice thing, it would show the young people what we went through with.
- Q. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you feel is important about the CCC that you would like to relate?
- A. I don't think there's another veteran up here today that was at Petit Jean Mountain. I expect the biggest part of them have passed on. All were WW1 veterans, and came from different places. They blasted some of the rocks, built steps and trails. We built trails all up and down Cedar Creek. There was some bootlegging, you could buy whisky anytime. Most of the guys had a ring around their forehead from that fruit jar drinking! People on the mountain had it.