

**Oral History Interview of
C.L. “Bobby” Lewis**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
August 10, 2016
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*World War II Veteran Interviews***

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Bobby Lewis as he discusses his time serving as a Navy aviator, and his life ranching.

Length of Interview: 01:49:43

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Keywords

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David Marshall (DM):

The date is August 10th, 2016. This is David Marshall interviewing Bobby Lewis in Lubbock, Texas.

Bobby Lewis (BL):

Now can you hold it a minute?

DM:

Sure can. [Pause in recording] So people call you Bobby.

BL:

I got to college before I knew that.

DM:

Really? How did that happen? You're named C.L. Lewis, which stands for—

BL:

Well I had a little cousin, double cousin [?] [00:00:23] I'm named after my daddy. They named me Clarence Lavern. And when they brought me home from the hospital she'd say, "No. Bobby." They thought she's saying "baby." And they'd say, "Baby?" And she'd say, "No, Bobby." Anyway, I went to college before I knew how to spell my name. I even had some land things—it's a good thing that we got it straight. I've been Bobby all my life.

DM:

What year were you born? What's your birthdate?

BL:

February the 2nd of '23.

DM:

Of '23. So you're ninety-three now?

BL:

Ninety-three.

DM:

And you were about four years younger than Elray [0:01:15.5]?

BL:

Yeah. There was one girl between us.

DM:

Oh there was?

BL:

Yeah, she's dead. And two boys behind me.

DM:

Okay. Five of you in all?

BL:

Uh-huh.

DM:

And you got to be the oldest boy?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay.

BL:

I had a real good family.

DM:

Let's talk about them a little bit. I know your maternal grandparents—your mother's parents—were M.B. and—

BL:

Sawyer.

DM:

--and Rebecca Sawyer. Is that right?

BL:

What'd you say?

DM:

M.B. and Rebecca? Sawyer?

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BL:

And Rebecca. Monroe and Rebecca.

DM:

Now they were really early in Terry County, weren't they?

BL:

Oh, real early.

DM:

Do you know when they came in?

BL:

I don't know. I never did know Grandpa Lewis. He died before I was around. But Grandpa come from Williamson County. Did you ever hear of the Hanging Tree?

DM:

In Williamson County?

BL:

In Williamson County.

DM:

Yeah.

BL:

Way down in Waco way over back that way.

DM:

If I did I've forgotten about the Hanging Tree. Tell me about it. And this is your grandfather Lewis or your grandfather Sawyer?

BL:

Grandpa Sawyer. He was little. Anyway the war—Civil War—was on, and those northern soldiers—Now this is the story I got. They got drunk and caught my grandfather's daddy and a bunch of them and hung them. They was drunk and they tell me they took their clothes and put them on and went to a dance that night.

DM:

Golly.

BL:

But anyway, Grandpa was real little and he doesn't really—Anderson Sawyer—Uncle Anderson. I think Grandpa got him to come out. And he was over up in Seagraves area. Or Loop.

DM:

Was he the first one of the family to come out here?

BL:

Yeah, he farmed. And a lot of them still living, you know. I got to know a bunch of them. There's two of them always came to our family reunion, but I remember someone bought that land down there—in Williamson County—and had a little ranch and named it the Hanging Tree Ranch. It kind of upset—I remember—my cousin.

DM:

Bad memories there.

BL:

Well I don't know. We didn't—you know we weren't—

DM:

Remember?

BL:

But it's still pretty famous spot.

DM:

I wonder if the tree is still there.

BL:

What'd you say?

DM:

I wonder if the tree is still there.

BL:

Oh yeah.

DM:

Is it?

BL:

Yeah, the tree's still there. I think they got maybe something. I never did go down and look at it. I've seen pictures.

DM:

What brought them up here? Why did they leave Williamson County?

BL:

I imagine just wanting to go west, I guess. First Grandpa was around Big Spring. And of course I don't know this, but that's the story I guess. He used to put his – they'd run their cattle. In the spring he'd drive them up on the Caprock and they'd just go.

DM:

Okay. No fences?

BL:

Huh?

DM:

No fences? Just free range?

BL:

No fences. So he—I've heard this story that was interesting to me, and I've heard if Grandpa talked about it he'd tear up. But those big cattle companies when you come in—Grandpa would get with one of them, and he'd cut his out to the side. I've heard this—that after they got about through gathering they'd kill the man that owned the cattle. Take the cattle. But Grandpa—a calf was sucking a cow with his brand, and he cut her out. And one of the fellows is supposed to—Grandpa put him back out. And the fellow that was boss there came over and told him to leave that alone. Told not Grandpa but told the other fellow. I think from what I hear that Grandpa felt like he'd saved his life. But then he moved to Terry County and he hauled lumber on wagons to build the house that's out there.

DM:

Did he bring it up from—?

BL:

Big Spring.

DM:

Big Spring? Yeah.

BL:

And he'd killed it. That's where they'd get their supplies.

DM:

Because that was the rail line, wasn't it?

BL:

What's that?

DM:

Was that the end of the railroad there at Big Spring? Or the closest rail line?

BL:

I don't know. I don't know.

DM:

What was he doing down in Williamson County? Was he farming or was he ranching?

BL:

What?

DM:

Way back in Williamson.

BL:

Terry County?

DM:

No down in Williamson County. Was he a farmer or a rancher or?

BL:

I imagine that was both. You know that's down there around Belton and everything. It's good country.

DM:

I ask because a lot of people were having trouble with the boll weevils, so they came west. So I didn't know if he was a cotton farmer coming west or a rancher looking for grassland?

BL:

Of course Grandpa, his dad was dead, and he was just little when all that happened. He was a firm man. I'll tell you this—I thought it was funny. I was working a grocery store at Brownfield. I was in high school. We needed change and I went over to the bank to get change, and it only about two blocks up. I went over and this group of men was out kind of on the corner, and they was talking about their grandkids. I went on in and attended to my business. I know this happened, because I was involved. When I got my change and they give it to me, I come out of the bank, and Grandpa was walking up. One of them asked him, he said, "Mr. Sawyer, how many grandkids do you have?" He didn't even stutter, he just said, "I don't know. Haven't got my mail yet." [laughter] He had thirteen kids and three boys. That tickled me and that always stuck with me. But back then they didn't fuss over grandkids like they do now.

DM:

Right. That's right.

BL:

I know Grandpa he built long sheds. It was at least as long as from here to on that other side there comes out.

DM:

Maybe fifty feet or so? Fifty or sixty feet?

BL:

He built them on—See he broke this ranch up into farmland and gave his kids a little something. They raised my load. Pilot—and he built them and put his stuff in those barns. I remember one or two times Grandpa got me to do something I never did, wasn't sure that he knew me. [Laughs] But we lived next door, but we weren't allowed to go over there because Mother and Daddy was afraid we'd bother them. I don't know.

DM:

What were their personalities like? What was Mr. Sawyer—what was M.B. Sawyer's—your granddaddy's—what was his personality like?

BL:

Well he was a firm man. I know when I say "firm" I mean firm. Nobody crossed him or anything. He was real honest and he put that above everything.

DM:

What about your grandma?

BL:

I went over there one time and Uncle Oscar was there. I was—Monroe Bill was born. That was Uncle Oscar's boy. He had a girl my age and then that little boy. I remember Uncle Oscar was sitting there and he says, "Ain't he a captain, Pa?" And Grandpa said, "Yep. I've seen a lot of captains in my days." [laughter] But he got me one time. I never will forget it because I thought it was the greatest thing in the world. He came over and got me to climb up into one of his—he had those big trees and had sawed off some limbs—to get up there and put whitewash on them.

DM:

Oh, right. To keep the bugs out.

BL:

I thought that was the greatest thing. He took me one time, and he'd go out where they piled cane out by a pile of maize. Go out there, and they'd screen the dirt off and put the maize and save that maize. You know it'd be in the ground. Most people just let it go. And I remember one time he was out on one of his places, and he was getting on up there. One of the renters was there, and he was working on the windmill. I've taken out Daddy without him. I remember a woman comes to the back door and hollered at that renter to be careful. He wasn't young as he used to be. All he was doing was handing a wrench up and stepping up there. And Grandpa was up there and had his legs around and leaning over working, and he's in his eighties. [laughter] But he was a hardworking man. I remember another thing. He had a car after he'd move to town, and he'd come through town and it didn't make a difference if it was a new car or not—it was all the same—but he'd have a big roll of barbwire tied to top of the car.

DM:

Why?

BL:

He'd have been working.

DM:

Oh he'd be working, so? What was your grandmother like?

BL:

An angel. She really was. She outlived him. He died in '41. I was in college. I remember when they'd come up. She lived, I think, in—I tell you what. If I can find that thing I've got, it might give you a lot of something you want. It's—

DM:

Something that's written up?

BL:

Yeah. It was a kind of a history. They handed them out. Had them at the reunion.

DM:

Well okay.

BL:

They gave one that died and everything. It had pictures. I wish you could go on out there.

DM:

I wish so, too.

BL:

It was a big crowd.

DM:

I'll tell you what, let's go ahead and just let you think of what comes to mind and then afterward I'll remind you and maybe we can get that and I'll take a look at it.

BL:

He was a Texas Ranger.

DM:

This was your—?

BL:

Grandpa was a Texas Ranger.

DM:

Grandpa Sawyer was a Texas Ranger?

BL:

Grandpa Sawyer. Grandpa Lewis—I know they moved. He had a store and post office in Rucker, that's down by De Leon. Comanche County. He got asthma real bad. That's the reason they moved out. My mother told me that he had stayed with them some. Said he had—it'd be real cold, and said he'd have the window open just perspiring, struggling for air. But I never knew him. Elray did. She was spoiled by him. They started to get on her. They said he'd take her down in the basement or cellar and had a watch, and she'd play with that watch.

DM:

A watch for--? Yeah. Well now, so, he came out for a drier climate?

BL:

Beg your pardon?

DM:

He came out because the climate was drier out here?

BL:

Yeah. It was good for asthma.

DM:

Right. Right. But you never knew him. Did you know his wife?

BL:

Yeah. Grandma Lewis. She was—I believe her name was Mary Elizabeth. It was Mary E. or something. Anyway, Grandma Lewis. Back then kids kind of took care of them. My – Eleanor White was my daddy's sister. She and Aunt Dela was close. They had a house down—I didn't know street numbers. I knew where they were—and I remember Grandma was living there. But later on she was real hard hearing. Aunt Dessie, she was married to Uncle Ulus. My daddy's sister married to my mother's brother. They owned – Uncle Clarence and Daddy built a little house back over behind Uncle Dolt's [?] [00:17:40]. Facing the other street. Just a block away from the school—high school. It had two bedrooms, and it was a nice little house. I never saw two people. Then they hired a woman to take with them. They have a garden and everything, and they – it was the nicest thing.

DM:

Oh really?

BL:

It was the nicest thing.

DM:

That's good because she was close to—

BL:

And I was in Corpus Christi. There was a Commander Dering, that if I met him today I'd whip him. Grandma was dying. I'd go by and see Grandma Lewis from school nearly every day. I had a calf, that's over yonder I haven't [?] [00:18:34] got a pig. But it was a club deal in school. I put

her in the car and drove down the alley, where she could look, and she gets closer to it—and she was just nearly blind—she gets closer to it than the guy that bought it. That calf—I got a two cent bonus because it was a club calf—I got a dime a pound. [laughter] But she was real, real good. But anyway I was in Corpus, and I was in the pool where they got behind, and I wasn't going to be able to fly for two to three weeks, I'd imagine.

DM:

Now this was—

BL:

I'd come in and sign my name.

DM:

Was this in the military? When you were in the military?

BL:

Yeah, I was in the navy.

DM:

Were you a pilot?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

Oh, okay.

BL:

I was a cadet then. Anyway, Grandma wanted to see me. She was dying. So I went and they gave me permission, but to get it verified by the Red Cross. I remember it cost me back then a dollar's big ____, [00:20:10] but I got my—and went in late that evening to officer of the day. And he starts signing. He said, "Oh, Commander likes to do things like this." And sent me up there. And I handed it to him. And he'd already okayed this. And he picked his pen up like he was going to sign it, and then didn't. And I started knocking. And his barracks and he was on the second floor and his back to it. And I started knocking at the wind. But I'm glad I didn't.

DM:

Yeah, but you didn't get to go out.

BL:

I went to a Catholic priest—chaplain. He was a little bit stronger doing things. He would try harder than Protestant. So I went to him, and he told me—he said, “I can get you leave.” But he said, “If I did I’m afraid you’d never leave this program.” So I didn’t get to see her. But I never will forget him. I’m bad on names, but I remember his. I’ll tell you the kind of fellow he was. It was pretty hard courses and we’d be studying the allocation of something. We had to have lights out at a certain time. But what we’d do some of the time we’d get under the covers and study. Most of the time we’d go down the head. He’d go down to the head and try to take, you know. Just a harsh ___ [00:21:59].

DM:

Just to make you stop studying and get—

BL:

What’d you say?

DM:

Why would he go down to the head? Just to get after you?

BL:

He’d go down there to try to catch us being down there. What he was, I think, and I’ve got my own ideas—See we was going to be officers. We was going to have men under us. And if we was going to blow up they wanted to know about it. That’s my thinking.

DM:

So they were tough on you for that reason?

BL:

I think. Yeah I think they had him there. He wasn’t doing half that. He was that kind of guy. But that as little as—oh they’d be maybe a high school principal. He was from—that’s what he was, and from Minnesota somewhere up there. Then all at once he’s got Uncle Sam behind him. He’d been run over all of his life.

DM:

He got some power.

BL:

Yeah. I remember when I first went in I was stationed at Austin. We was stationed at the University of Texas. I was in Roberts Hall. But we couldn’t have anything to do with the college. I mean we had our own classes, our own places, everything was separate.

DM:

That's unusual. Now, you mentioned that—so you didn't know your Grandfather Lewis, but you knew your Grandmother Lewis. Now you mentioned that your Grandfather Sawyer was a Texas Ranger. Did you ever hear any stories about when he was a Texas Ranger?

BL:

I heard that he killed his first buffalo—just before you go down there's a windmill out there. They call it the Red Onion Mill. I was always told that's where he killed his first buffalo.

DM:

Down in Williamson County or out here?

BL:

Yeah. When he was a Texas Ranger.

DM:

Did you hear any other stories about those days?

BL:

Uh?

DM:

Did ever hear any other stories?

BL:

I'd like to have. But Grandpa didn't—We was told to stay away from over there. I remember they had a pecan tree at the old Alexander house. They had a pecan tree—we had a fence there—and if we couldn't get those pecans, but if they fell off and was on the ground on our side we could have it. Which sat out there [00:24:54] we'd sit out there with air guns and shoot the tree for pecans. [laughter]

DM:

What can you tell me about your parents?

BL:

What'd you say?

DM:

What can you tell me about your parents?

BL:

My parents?

DM:

I've got their name is Clyde and—

BL:

Ora. That's it. The way I describe them—the way I tell people—I wouldn't trade mine for anybody's childhood. Not for nobody. I'd rather be—was raised at Brownfield and everything was just right. I tell them that mother was the kind of woman—she had five children. Every one of us thought we was an only child. And my daddy—the way I describe him—I think if you find people down there they'll agree with both things. I had friends that just thought Mom was the grandest thing in the world. I never saw her upset but one time. That was somebody mistreating the kids. The way I explain Daddy is that if you was in a group—didn't make any difference how much—how good a time you was having, if Daddy walked up you had a better time, had more fun.

DM:

Golly, how nice.

BL:

He was a singer. I didn't get none of that. My kids did, but I didn't.

DM:

Now he ran a mercantile store. He and your mamma, or he and—one of them or both of them ran a mercantile store?

BL:

Yeah, he did. Before I could remember they had something called Lewis Brothers. But it was gone and the one I knew was—it might have been, but I don't know—but it was a dry goods store that Daddy had.

DM:

Can you—do you remember it?

BL:

Oh I remember it.

DM:

Oh, can you tell me about it?

BL:

I remember—it's during the Depression—well they sold it to that Cobbs. Cobbs was drummers, you know, salesmen. They called them drummers come in.

DM:

Peddlers.

BL:

That's what they had. They sold it to them on the credit.

DM:

Well what was the store like? Can you kind of describe it?

BL:

Oh yeah.

DM:

It's downtown from the Brown—

BL:

It's right on the corner. It had of course about three places, I think, with glass where they could put stuff. The doors you go in. and then they had tables and stuff hanging. Then they had a upstairs where they did—back then they'd sell you the ducking and make you a cotton sack. Well my aunt was taking the group out—that was before cotton strippers and things. And she was taking a group out and they was pick cotton. That looked good to me. So Buck Michie and I—he was my best friend – as good a friend as I ever had. He moved away when we was in sixth grade, and we still correspond.

DM:

Now tell me his name again?

BL:

Buck Michie.

DM:

Michie.

BL:

His name is H.D. One time I was down in Peace, and he and I went out to eat. He lived in Fort Worth now. I think he's in pretty bad shape. I called him the other day. I was worried about him. And she said, "He's resting." He was older than me. Everybody called him Brownfield Buck.

DM:

Last name was "Michie" like M-I-C—

BL:

M-I-C-H-I-E. Had the corner drug at Brownfield. Had ____ [00:29:10] system grocery store a while. And then he—when we was in the sixth grade, Mrs. Denis was our teacher. We was sitting together on the far side next to the windows on the second seat, and he told me that he was moving to—having to move to—Oh, where's the penitentiary in Oklahoma? I can't remember.

DM:

I don't know.

BL:

McAllister. And we sat there and cried right there. And he tells me—he said it changed his whole life. But I can't remember the story I started to tell.

DM:

Well you were talking about—

BL:

Oh, we was going out and pick cotton. Him and I decided we would. I went down and bought me a ducking, and I took it upstairs and they made me a cotton sack and I went out.

DM:

Now how old were you?

BL:

Oh, I imagine six or five. Something. But anyway I went out. I thought I'd never get that sack paid for, and when I did I haven't picked cotton anymore. [laughter]

DM:

Made you want to go into ranching, is that it? [laughter]

BL:

Oh I was going to pick that cotton for that money. And I see a lot of people like that. They look at something—I had some boys down in Leon County haul hay. I was baling it and they'd haul it in. And there was one boy that hauled, and they'd be laying up in that hay. They'd go wait. And I finally had to tell them that, "We've got to get this hay in. You've learned one thing: that's not a good time to haul hay." [laughter]

DM:

And it's always in the hot time of year.

BL:

You know I could see the payday. I didn't see what was between there. And that's what those hay haulers are. And a lot of kids—they need to learn that.

DM:

So y'all had ducking up stairs in the mercantile. Did you sell just about everything except for the groceries—produce?

BL:

They just sold dry goods.

DM:

Yeah, dry goods.

BL:

And material.

DM:

And then the Michie's had the grocery store? The Michie's had the grocery store?

BL:

They might have. I was too little to know about that.

DM:

How old were you when you started working at the grocery store? Didn't you work at a Piggly Wiggly, didn't you say?

BL:

Yeah. The first time I got—me and this Buck Michie—we got us a job delivering ____ [00:32.19].

DM:

Oh yeah.

BL:

Red and white. And it was on the corner. It was a big grocery store. And we'd get up four to eight. Go down there and sweep and stock the shelves, count the eggs, sack them. And when it got light—Old Sam Chisolm—he was a little older than us. He drove an old international pickup. We'd be on each side. And deliver surplus [?][00:32:51] all over town. We'd get back about ten—nine thirty. We'd run across the street and deliver one street, and we got a free pass—Earl Jones on the show. But he did it by the way you came. But he made a trade with us—because we got to go over and run the mall—that he'd give us a steady job. We'd get a free pass. That was a dime. That was a quarter for that and a dime. We'd go to the show and we'd meet these two little yellow hat – May Edda Murphy and Katherine Bynum. I don't know how old we were. I imagine in probably third grade or something. But we'd meet them on the eighth row. We wouldn't sit with them, we'd sit behind them. I'd spend a nickel to get some gum or popcorn or something and share with them. Then my pass – I saved two dimes every week. I brought me a little—got me a little dime bank, and you put it in and it'd just hold dimes. You put your dimes in there and when you get ten dollars you screw the top in, and it pushes out the bottom. I remember I went down to Mr. Kendrick's and opened my bank account. I was thinking I was nine, but I had to be—well I could have been, because I was delivering surplus [00:34.50]. Later on I was working in those stores. But he got a big kick out of that. But you know I still have that account.

DM:

Do you really? Golly!

BL:

And the bank's old. It changed hands several times, and then it sold to—they went way out on close to Wolfforth.

DM:

Well now, what was the name of the bank back then when you opened an account?

BL:

First National.

DM:

First National? Okay. What was the name of the grocery store when you first started working there?

BL:

First one was Piggly Wiggly.

DM:

Oh, it was?

BL:

It belonged to Humphreys, here in Lubbock. That's what I think.

DM:

Well you were pretty young—third grade or so—had a job there.

BL:

What'd you say?

DM:

Third grade or so and you were doing a little bit of work at the grocery store and delivering circulars.

BL:

Oh man, I went to work for — it was a dollar and a half a day. And it was a day. We'd stay open until after the midnight show, and get down there before daylight. And I thought this is what I was getting a dollar and a half, and I think I thought I was—

DM:

Dropped something right there.

BL:

I thought I was the envy of most of the kids because I had a job. One day I went in—now we'd been working—

DM:

Piggly Wiggly number ten.

BL:

But they come in and I remember one time they was going to pay us and they raised us to two dollars. And I went up to get my money and they handed me a dollar ninety eight and this.

DM:

Golly.

BL:

That was my first social security—might be the first social security—

DM:

You think that was your very first one?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

Let me see it.

BL:

1937.

DM:

Golly, got your originals—Yeah, there's the date! Original social security card and a card here, "Piggly Wiggly Number Ten, 111 South First, Brownfield, Texas."

BL:

You see what they got on it? You don't see anything like that. Clarence Lavern, in parenthesis, "B."

DM:

B.

BL:

So there in Piggly Wiggly's they'd know who it was. [laughter]

DM:

Yeah, that's right. Oh, golly. When you were in school did you have any particular teachers that you remember and that you liked or disliked?

BL:

I can remember just about all of them.

DM:

Is that right?

BL:

I remember Mrs. Tankersly.

DM:

Tankersly?

BL:

Yeah, that was—I think her husband was—I believe it was Jay.

DM:

Jay?

BL:

I forget. But anyway that was the second grade, and one of the main things I can remember; we had a canary in there named Dicky. And the one that acted the best in their class got to take that bird home with them for the weekend.

DM:

Really? [laughter] That's a good idea. That'd make you want to act good, wouldn't it?

BL:

My first teacher was Miss Carpenter. A lot of these names—not like my teachers, but like Bobby Moore. He ended up—when I came to Tech—he owned down on University, the other side, it was a dance hall for a long time. But I remember where he lived in Brownfield. But we had lived in that old red brick building, and I sure hate to see them tear it down. But it was three stories, and you go up those stairs, and our classroom was just—You turned and go up the other stairs, next floor. This Miss Savage was a real good teacher. She's famous here in Lubbock. She was recognized—she came to Lubbock after. She was our principal, and I'd seen her whip a boy all the way up and back down off them stick. But she was a good teacher.

DM:

[laughter] What would she use? What would they use for whipping? Would they use a paddle or a switch?

BL:

Oh whatever. I believe she used a strap.

DM:

A strap.

BL:

But I think that's the main thing wrong with this country now. They need to put that board back in school. I couldn't teach now. I couldn't. They'd send me to pen. [laughter]

DM:

Times are different, that's for sure.

BL:

I remember. We had tables in there. Miss Carpenter was our teacher. We'd have four at a table. We'd have naps, milk—you know they'd bring it in there.

DM:

Little cartons?

BL:

What'd you say?

DM:

Little cartons of milk?

BL:

No, they were the bottles. I don't mind – they had cartons then.

DM:

Little glass bottles, huh?

BL:

I'd bring my report card home. Joey Sawyer was my cousin, and his cousin—Tommy Hicks—and his cousin was Berghella Nan Dunn.

DM:

I'm sorry, what was the name?

BL:

That was Berghella Nan Dunn.

DM:

Berghella?

BL:

Yeah. They called her Berghella. They didn't call her the Nan.

DM:

Do you know how that—

BL:

We was four of us at that table and we was sit out two or three times for talking and have to sit in the corridor. I remember Mrs. Savage came by and we hid under those stairs. She's going to get us. But I'd bring home my report card and it'd have "Talking" and they'd say, "Who you talking to?" And I'd say, "Joey." Joey'd say, you know, who she was—Mind if I go to the bathroom?

DM:

No, I don't mind at all. I'll pause this here. [Pause in recording] Alright, it says in there that when you were a kid—the way I read it—it said when you were a kid that you went out there to the Crossroads Ranch to visit, and that back then you just said that was the grandest place in the world. That you really liked that ranch.

BL:

Well all my life I lived in Brownfield and I thought that particular place was something.

DM:

How far was that from Brownfield? How far is that?

BL:

I think it's sixty miles from Tatum, and about eighteen miles out of Tatum. It's a good ranch. It had tight land and sanded land. You won't mix land. I had my ranch down there and, boy, I could run more cattle down there. I had about thirty five hundred, four thousand acres down there.

DM:

A lot more grass?

BL:

Well, rain. I could run more cattle down there than I could out here. But you worked a lot harder at everything down there. I think that's what's wrong with my ears. In the service I flew an airplane and after that I was in wind over cleaning up that land. I bought that land and it wasn't much. I improved it. I liked it because one reason, I did the improvement. I made it. And I tell you, I had the best friends in the world down on that ranch. When you go they're like Easterners. You go down there and they'd stand, they'd stare. They don't trust you if your great grandpa

wasn't buried there. Wasn't farmed there. But if they ever accept you—Out here, everybody. If you go steal something they recognize you're a thief. But down there, well the way I describe them, if you robbed a bank, hell you needed the money. Sure good people. [Pause in recording]

DM:

You said when Pearl Harbor was bombed—

BL:

Yeah. When Pearl Harbor was bombed. Of course I didn't know it that day. Man, somebody went to the show. We was sitting in there and a group come in saying Pearl Harbor was bombed. I knew it was bad the way they was acting, but there wasn't nobody in that show—and all of us college years—where in the hell is Pearl Harbor? But everybody was ready to go. I didn't think I'd live through that. All I'd known about war was what I'd seen in the show and everybody got killed.

DM:

You were awfully young then. You graduated from Brownfield in 1940, is that right?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

So you went—did you go to Tech in the fall of '40?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

Oh, okay. And then it was a year from that next December when they bombed Pearl Harbor. So you were probably in your second year at Tech at that time?

BL:

Yeah, I think I was. And I think I went another year. I finished three years, and then I volunteered.

DM:

Okay. You volunteered as a Navy?

BL:

Naval Air Corps.

DM:

Navel Air Corps. Now, when you were at Tech before the war were you in ROTC?

BL:

What'd you say?

DM:

Did they have some kind of a training program at Tech?

BL:

Oh, it had the—what is they called it? You know where they go and study.

DM:

The Cadet Training Corps, or something like that?

BL:

No. You're talking about during the war?

DM:

Yes, I'm talking about when the war started and you were still at—

BL:

We already had ROTC. There wasn't too many in that. But everybody was ready to go. Nobody thought they was going to live through it. But they was ready.

DM:

You want me to set those somewhere for you? I can put them back over there.

BL:

If you can.

DM:

Sure. Let me just get these first. I'm going to set them right over here. This is where you got them, I think.

BL:

Just set them down there.

DM:

Right there okay.

[inaudible 00:46:56]

BL:

That's my grandson's three kids.

DM:

Oh, aren't they cute?

BL:

That's full of pictures of them. I can get that back in. You've got to take out part of it.

DM:

Oh, you do? Well I'll just kind of prop it up here where it's not too much in your way. Well tell me about when you first went to Tech. When you graduated and did you—

BL:

I went there in 1940. The Ag. Taking Ag Education. Because my plan, like I told you, I was going to get a job teaching school and buy something and live cheap as I could, and live on land and put—But anyway I went in '40. Most time I'd work on ranches in summer. Then I joined I think kind of in the fall, but they didn't call me until summer. And then I was—that's when I was a cadet.

DM:

Uh-huh. I see. Picture here. Yeah, that's a handsome cadet there.

BL:

This is a little earlier than that one. [laughter] But then when the war was over I was—I think it must be that I had a lot of education courses. Whenever I got out the first thing they did they sent me to Atlanta after I was commissioned. Got a picture somewhere of that. But I know there was a little woman there and had a little boy. The nicest thing. They'd make ice cream out of marshmallows. You know the sugar, you couldn't get it. Peach—every street there nearly was named Peach tree. I went back to Atlanta. Gosh it has grown.

DM:

Well were you stationed in Atlanta?

BL:

I was stationed in Atlanta and flew in Howards. That was a sweet little plane. It was covered. And I had a seat back there. But I got my instrument rating there.

DM:

In a Howard, you said?

BL:

In a Howard plane.

DM:

Was that a single propeller plane?

BL:

Yes. Didn't have jets then. I took all the instruments – got a high rating in instruments. Then they sent me – took me somewhere else, and I flew PBV's [Patrol Bomber and Y]. And then they put me as an instructor at Pensacola. And I was there when the war ended.

DM:

I talked to a PBV pilot.

BL:

I flew PBV's between Atlanta and Ocala.

DM:

Well I talked to a PBV pilot living up in Plainview about a year ago. A fellow up in Plainview that I talked to was a PBV pilot, down there somewhere around Pensacola. I don't know.

BL:

Did he fly PBV's?

DM:

He flew PBV's, yeah. His name was—

BL:

I've got a picture of a PBV friend of mine here. Retired from the Army.

DM:

Okay. This guy's last name was Cloyd, I think. Cloyd or something. Something like that. I can't remember for sure.

BL:

Those old PBV's—now I'm going to tell you something. They'll do more than you say. We'd loop them.

DM:

Oh, really?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

They've got pontoons on them, don't they?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

They had pontoons, but you could loop them.

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

Golly.

BL:

But you'd have to get the speed. My saying was they landed—took off at seventy, cruised at seventy, and landed at seventy. [laughter] Now when they was—when at first they didn't have radar, either.

DM:

Oh, yeah.

BL:

Those old PBY's had credit for sinking more tonnage than the kamikazes. They called them the "black weathers", I think. They painted them black, and they'd get up above and the ships couldn't see them. They dropped it on them.

DM:

Now, they were looking for submarines off of Florida, weren't they?

BL:

Oh, yeah.

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DM:

German?

BL:

See I'll tell you about it. We flew sectors; two hours this way, two hours that way, and two hours back. You're out over the water all that time. You get a little anxious when you're heading back. Won't know if that land is going to show up. [laughter] But it always does. I remember a fellow from home—Brownfield—that was bragging about what an outfit he was. And his navigator—they always got back within five minutes. When we missed it five minutes we was lost.

DM:

Did you have radio communication?

BL:

Oh, yeah. And we had—the hard part. Say you land a normal landing if the water's choppy. If it's glassy you can't tell—it's as far off from as the sky. So then you make power landings and you set it whatever speed you're going to land and drop down about two hundred feet a minute and then you come onto the water. When you hit that water—sure cut nose up.

DM:

Now what about in choppy water?

BL:

Well choppy water you make normal landings because you can judge it. You can look out and make it by visual. All you just—a normal landing you get right above it and ready to pull up. And then just forwards falls and you throw it into a stall and it just drops in that water.

DM:

Do you go along the side the wave if the waves are coming like this? Do you go into the waves, or you go with the waves, or do you go sideways into the waves? Is there a particular--?

BL:

Always into the wind.

DM:

Into the wind?

BL:

You go into them. But those—you don't have a wave like that. It's always got a white top on it. And they all look alike.

DM:

Seems like you could flip one of those things over if you hit wrong.

BL:

I had a student that got—see the Army, they had to have—the final approach had to be about a mile. In the Navy we got six. You got where you're going to land and you're six hundred feet. Then you throttle back and you go into it. And they got where they're trying them like at Pensacola. They'll have a big six foot circle down there and you're supposed to hit in that circle. If you go overseas you see a set of tracks way down there and then another—skid marks, where they hit. That's the Navy and the Marine Corps down here. And that's the Army down there.

DM:

Where did you fly your first airplane? When did you learn to first fly?

BL:

Houston.

DM:

In Houston after you were in the military?

BL:

Yeah. We was flying civilian, little planes. I was at Cliff Hyde Flying School—Cliff Hyde Airport, I don't know where.

DM:

So you went in—you volunteered—to be a Navy aviator, I guess?

BL:

Yeah. Naval Air Force. When I took the course, took tests in Tech and then this—You catch a train and go to Dallas. Then you sign up there. I remember we was there and they asked me—you lie to them or anything because you want in—and I'd never been up, never saw any. One time if an airplane comes over everybody come out and looked, you know. It was something else. My uncle out there in this ranch—I bought that ranch there.

DM:

Crossroads?

BL:

Yeah. Airplane come over and it was bringing cattle in. It's flying kind of low. Cattle got to where so many of them they don't pay any—but they was running. I remember, anyways. "Who

in the hell does he think he is? Lindbergh?" You know that's when all that happened. And a fellow went on and landed out there on his pasture. He rode out there, and he got out and introduced himself, and it was Lindbergh. [laughter] He stayed there four or five days.

DM:

Did he? Golly. Was he needing—

BL:

In just a two room shack.

DM:

Well was he just dropping in to—

BL:

No, he just rested. It was a little bit before that his kid was kidnapped. Lindbergh was a good fellow. Aunt Dessie's telling me that Meryl—she's a couple years older than me—she said that she's getting on Meryl to soften her syrup or gravy or something. She started getting on him and Meryl says, "Well he'll eat it." [laughter] and she did. They said, "Well he's doing it."

DM:

To Lindbergh? About Lindbergh? What did they say about the kind of person he was? Did they say anything about what he was like?

BL:

About what?

DM:

Did your aunt and uncle say anything about what Lindbergh was like? His personality?

BL:

Yeah. They tried to keep it quiet. He wanted to rest. But they said he slept with a pillow over his head. He said he was just as plain as plain could be.

DM:

Golly. Isn't that something? That was after his—I guess that was after his trans-Atlantic flight, then?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

Do you know what year it would have been?

BL:

I didn't know. It may tell in there. I don't know.

DM:

It didn't mention the year. Isn't that something? It's just not everyday someone famous as Lindberg drops in.

BL:

Drops in and spends the night.

DM:

Scatters your cattle. [laughter]

BL:

That didn't sit good with Uncle Ulus. Him scattering them cattle. [laughter]

DM:

Well okay. So you were in the—what year did you enter into the military? What year did you volunteer? Was that in '42?

BL:

I volunteered—

DM:

'43?

BL:

I think it was first of November of—forty—the war broke out in '45? No, that's the year it was over.

DM:

Yeah it started in—

BL:

'41.

DM:

Just started December of '41.

BL:

I went in in '43.

DM:

In November, you said?

BL:

Yeah. I know I was plowing—planting maize on the Farmall tractor out on Claude Little's place. I joined in November/December, something. Anyway, I thought I was going right in and they didn't call me until the next June, I think it was.

DM:

The June of '44?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

About the time of the D-Day invasion. Is that something—

BL:

I was on a—mother come out with my letter and I got off the tractor and left it right there in that field. [laughter]

DM:

Well you probably—you didn't—you were a little late in the war, then? You weren't sent overseas were you?

BL:

No. I got oversea pay, muster now pay, just like I did. Felt bad about that. But I took it because, see, I went outside the eight mile limit when I was running one of those PBV's. I was running submarine patrol. See a submarine's got to come up and recharge its—and it's got to come up to do it. And if you keep it guarded—I was coming in and it's up to me. You know if you have a ship that's getting close to this country and it doesn't know your signal, you're not supposed to ask questions. You're supposed to bomb them. I went down and I tried to challenge them. Me and my crew. I could see their eyes were just as blue as the sky. They was all looking, "huh?" They run up their code the day before. I was supposed to just—and I thought, "Oh, hell." So I

challenged them again and, boy, zip! They sure did change. But that's about as close as I've ever had to shooting. I've got a grandson that was in the Army—second tour in Iraq—that he was hit in the head with a grenade launcher. And nothing but prayer saved that boy. He was down long and I saw him, well, over here at this revival. He lost that eye. But it's not at all—he just can't see out of it. It's blue. But he sure is a good boy.

DM:

He's lucky to be alive.

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

Did you happen to see any German submarines when you were doing those runs?

BL:

Did I what?

DM:

Did you ever see a German submarine when you were out there?

BL:

I never did have one come up. Like I said the reason they was doing it; it kept them out.

DM:

Keet them down.

BL:

Well they couldn't come in if they couldn't come up.

DM:

Right. Right. Right. Yeah, good idea.

BL:

We have a course—you might know about it—called “identification”. First time you wouldn't believe you could ever. It'll say, “Ready, now.” And they've got it timed, and they'll flash different ships, airplanes, enemies and you –

DM:

Silhouettes?

BL:

Yeah. And you've got to—it's a plane, itself, and you've got to identify it. And it's a hundredth of a second.

DM:

Wow.

BL:

Now that's—I mean I thought, "They're crazy." Because you know up until you get used to it and it's odd. He'll say, "Ready, now." And you do like that and focus on it and it'll—and you just stay there. It'll go away but the sight will come register on your brain.

DM:

Golly. Isn't that something?

BL:

Whoever thought of that? That's a pretty important thing.

DM:

Pretty good way to learn. When did you muster out of the military?

BL:

I'm not out yet, I don't think. [laughter] Quick as the war was over I had my plan. I wanted out. They froze me for a month or two. I had my points. They gave the cadets—one thing, it was bad business because they gave the cadets—they'd been in a year counting on getting their commission. That's all they're thinking about. That's all they drill in you and you think you'd be disgraced for life if you wash out. And many of them did, too. But then all at once they say, "You can get out now, or you can sign up for two or three more years." You've got to do one or the other. And they've been wanting those wings, and they're in the last stage and then—boy, now you're talking about, it was dangerous to fly with them. Your students and you check them out. They could fly but their mind wasn't on it. But that's the way. But I got out. It was either the seventeenth or eighteenth of December.

DM:

Of '45?

BL:

'45.

DM:

Well and you had a good reason, too, because you were about to finish your degree.

BL:

Yeah. I went back, and just quick as I could I got back to Tech and finished up.

DM:

Did you go that spring?

BL:

What'd you say?

DM:

Did you go back that spring? After you got out did you go January or February back?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

I understand—and you went back on the G.I. Bill, is that right?

BL:

Yeah. It was ninety dollars if you was married, and seventy five if you was single.

DM:

Well you were married, too, by now, weren't you?

BL:

What'd you say?

DM:

Didn't you get married in '45?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay.

BL:

And then I remember out here I was getting ninety. They gave us a raise, so much. Everything in town—we really got a cut, because everything—our room and board went up that amount. Everywhere we went they'd gone up the rent.

DM:

Right. Tell me about your wife. How did you meet her? Ruth, was it?

BL:

Yeah. I met her in Glen Rose, Texas one summer.

DM:

Oh, yeah. I know Glen Rose. What was her last name?

BL:

Her last name was Deshield [?] [01:07:54]. She's the mother of my children.

DM:

Deshield [01:07:58]?

BL:

Yeah. She's the one that I divorced from.

DM:

Okay.

BL:

She said I worked too much. I wonder who she thought I was working—but I didn't care. I had all the faith in the world. It was her parents. I'd have never had anything if she hadn't left.

DM:

So you went back to Tech, you were married at the time, and so you started back in '46, it sounds like. Spring of '46.

BL:

I finished in the fall of '46.

DM:

Oh, good.

BL:

My wife and I both did. But we didn't go through the exercise until January of '47.

DM:

Oh, is that right?

BL:

So I guess we graduated, because you don't have to go through the exercise. Then I moved down to Leon County.

DM:

Right away? You moved down there right away?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

Oh, okay.

BL:

I had been looking, writing, and there was a girl in school out here. She was from Normangee. And she was going back down there and she had—well they had a pretty good place. See, it's in Leon County, too.

DM:

What was the name of it?

BL:

Normangee.

DM:

Normangee?

BL:

Yeah. And she had a place and I found about the price of land and everything.

DM:

I don't remember Normangee. How do you spell "Normangee"?

BL:

N-o-r-m-a-n-g-e. [N-o-r-m-a-n-g-e-e.]

DM:

Golly, I don't remember ever seeing that.

BL:

No, N-o-r-m-o-n.

DM:

m-a-n? Or m-o-n?

BL:

Normangee. That's a good better country, really, than I was in. See I got a G.I. Bill and I don't remember if it was—I know one was fifty something hundred dollars. I bought a house, twenty five acres of land, about a three acre orchard, and twenty something pecan trees, and spring in the land, a big log barn, a two car garage with a dirt floor, and a little pantry, and then a room about the size of this that would do to live in. But I used it as a storage space.

DM:

About a 12 by 20.

BL:

And it cost me fifty-three hundred dollars.

DM:

Were you able to get a veteran's loan or something like that?

BL:

That was the G.I. Loan. See you have a federal loan and a state loan. I think that that was my state loan. I bought that in Buffalo. Next door to the school. And then I bought five hundred and something acres with my federal G.I.

DM:

Good, good. Oh, I was going to ask you, too, about when you were at Texas Tech. Here you were—you were at Tech before the war, and during those early years of war, and then you came back after the war. What kind of changes? Did you see any changes on campus during that time? Were there?

BL:

Well, naturally would be because I was married when I come back.

DM:

Well I'm talking about on the campus itself, though. Like, did they have more buildings?

BL:

Yeah. One thing when all we had was that there barn and you know that round—

DM:

Pavilion.

BL:

Judge cattle.

DM:

Livestock.

BL:

And then they had a barracks. That's all that was in the Ag building. But when I come back—no that's when I came. But they started building that Ag building before I left, and it was there. They had a dairy place and—

DM:

They had a dairy processing that made ice cream and things like that. Yeah.

BL:

They'd take them quite a bit of that farm and started—wasn't nothing like it is now.

DM:

Well I'll tell you, our building—the building I work in—is a pretty new building. Well it's twenty years old. But it's built right between the livestock pavilion and the dairy barn. It's right there. So I look out this window there's the dairy barn, I look out this window there's the livestock pavilion.

BL:

They wanted to tear that dairy barn down at one time.

DM:

Wanted to, but they've saved it.

BL:

Well people just—the X's and everything just raised so much—

DM:

Yeah. But now I've heard that right after the war there were a lot of guys coming back on the G.I. Bill, and so they had annexes for them. That the campus was expanding very quickly. Now that might have been after you had already left. They say so many guys came back that they were putting in new buildings—but just temporary buildings, because they couldn't build fast enough.

BL:

You'd have thought that the classrooms when I first went up there—we didn't ever think we'd ever be in the war. It was a barracks building, I think.

DM:

Uh-huh. Okay. Well I'll be.

BL:

I remember—this is interesting to me—I remember Dean Stangel and they dug an irrigation well out here, and he just threw a fit. He said it'd run—he said this would be a desert in five years. He missed a little, but I think it will be.

DM:

How long do you think it's going to last before we run out of water?

BL:

I know—I had some land over there that I gave the girls that—it's going down pretty fast. I've to last a little bit, but I kind of helped them get—learn how to take it. Then I've stayed out of it. A fellow brought me this. He'll come back and I'll talk to him. You just can't imagine what a good person he is. Out farming from New Mexico one year. I had a friend, R.W., best friend I ever had—and he lived over there and I custom farmed it.

DM:

If you had to take a guess, let's say in Terry County, I know it varies—the water—

BL:

This was Gaines County.

DM:

Yeah. The water levels here—the level is different here and there—but down in that country, if you had to guess, how long would you say that there's going to be irrigation water available?

BL:

Well I know I bought a thousand acres in Gaines County—had all the water in the world. That section is sectioned in halves, what it was. The section, before I quit it had to take off, that last joint to—there's more water in it.

DM:

Oh, I see.

BL:

And I had five or six wells. I know when it started—I forgot my figures—but fifty gallon well or something like that. You just wouldn't even drill. Now it's real good if you get it. This country, I don't know what it's going to do when the irrigation goes. What would happen this year? Because of dry land showing up. I was reading about, in the paper this morning, Brownfield that gar—and they had it one time. Everybody tried it—to fell to bankruptcy, and they lost it. Now this guy has come back and they're talking about it, with the price that it is. The yield together is going to be hard. But it's going to be hard on cotton and everything else.

DM:

Now your love was always—was your love always ranching? Did you ever do any farming, really?

BL:

I had—

DM:

That—

BL:

--this fellow—this guy that's as good a friend as I ever had—he's dead now—but he's the one that I had him custom farm. His son-in-law farmed it right after I bought it. And they got a hail—I believe it's in September, and I've never seen it. It was just a stem that long, black. It was gone.

DM:

About an inch or two sticking out of the ground.

BL:

Yeah. And he just thought—that was his first year.

DM:
Oh no.

BL:
He threw and he came to Lubbock and made a plumber. I tried to get him to stay. I said, "We'll make it." But he was—he came up here and I see him all the time. But I couldn't get a renter that late and I farmed it. So I did pretty good, so I farmed it again. [laughter] But this fellow farms it now.

DM:
Okay. But ranching's what you've mostly done?

BL:
Oh, that's all. This was for my kids.

DM:
Now this is—this ranching—your experiences are very interesting to me because you had your ranch in central Texas, and then you had your ranch in New Mexico, Leon County and Lee County.

BL:
Yeah.

DM:
And a big ranch out in New Mexico. The article said twenty thousand acres.

BL:
How much?

DM:
The article says twenty thousand acres? Is that right?

BL:
Yeah.

DM:
That's a big ranch. But now what about water out there? I guess there's enough for just windmill—

BL:

Just windmill.

DM:

--it up for stock ponds?

BL:

I had one well that made a hundred gallons a minute, and I wanted to keep it quiet. I didn't want the farmers to come out there. [laughter] One thing about my ranch in New Mexico; I had two of the sandy sections. I don't know where it's—half of each section or might have been full section that was state lease. Are you familiar with New Mexico state lease?

DM:

No.

BL:

Most of the ranches in New Mexico are state lease.

DM:

Now what does that mean exactly? They're "state lease"?

BL:

It's pretty good to have. I've a friend that's got—oh I imagine he's got fifteen-twenty sections, and it's all state lease. But that state lease brings about a hundred dollars an acre, because the laws in New Mexico. You pay so much every year. This year they are really hollering. They've got somebody in there that's going way up on—

DM:

Now what is that? How does that work? That state lease?

BL:

Well you own that lease. But if they get oil you don't have any minerals.

DM:

The state gets the oil. I got you. They pay you for that opportunity? They pay you a lease amount if you're a landowner?

BL:

The way they did—it's the same way in Texas. I know we had a half section farm down there—her daddy did—that was the state owned the minerals. He owned the ground. But they would

give him—I don't remember whether it was half of what he leased it for or all of it—for leasing it. But they take the oil.

DM:

The state would pay that lease on it.

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

I got you.

BL:

No, the oil company leased it.

DM:

I got you, okay.

BL:

You got the right to lease it, but they get half the money, I think. You get for handing in farm.

DM:

But these lands were very different. You had your twenty thousand acres out there in Lee County. How big was your Leon County?

BL:

When I left I had about thirty-eight hundred or four thousand.

DM:

That's a big ranch. That's a big ranch in central Texas.

BL:

That was an awful big ranch down there. And I bought it just a strip at a time.

DM:

Now how many cattle could you run on an acre down there around Buffalo, in Leon?

BL:

Over close to Longview—what's the name of that? It's an experiment station there. I went over there to see it. Coastal made that country. They had—let me get it. Let me show you.

DM:

Talking about Coastal Bermuda?

BL:

What'd you say?

DM:

Are you talking about Coastal Bermudagrass?

BL:

Yeah. Let me show you. You can really—you can make more money and less work because you have to fertilize that country—it's weak. But I enjoy.

DM:

You're talking about out in—

BL:

In Leon County.

DM:

In Leon. Yeah.

BL:

This is all—this is a thirty acre block, and they cut it in three ways—ten. They put thirty cows and a bull on. They put this in here. They would fertilize this, and cut this in for hay.

DM:

Oh, okay. One third was for the cattle, one third was for the hay, one third was being fertilized.

BL:

You'll understand it in a minute. They'd leave that in there thirty days, then they'd close the gate, put them in this one, and then—but they're cutting hay and they fertilize every time. All the time. It costs a lot of money to do this. Then they'd come—they'd use oil. But they was putting thirty cows and a bull and raising enough feed on that thirty acres to run thirty cows. Now that's a cow an acre. You take—the way I did, I had some that I'd clean up. It kept me broke all the time because I was—it cost a lot to clean it up. I bought a dozer and run it. And then I had to fertilize it ever year. I didn't fertilize it like they would this. I'd fertilize once a year, and I'd have a place for hay and I could get my hay, but I had to buy my cape [?] [01:25.25]. You just stop to think, a cow an acre.

DM:

And that water down in—

BL:

That's on there. You'd run twelve-fifteen cows to a section.

DM:

Section, yeah. [laughter]

BL:

But out there you run them, down there you work them.

DM:

Work. Yes. I see. I see what you're talking about.

BL:

But I've got to go back down there and visit. And I'm telling you that is pretty.

DM:

Well you know I grew up working on those big ranches west of Fort Worth. I grew up working on those big ranches west of Fort Worth when I was a kid, and it was all about keeping that brush cleaned out and no picking cockleburs, and that's what we spent our time doing. It wasn't—not much of the fun part of rounding up cattle and—

BL:

You had—you could've done that anywhere, couldn't you? [laughter]

DM:

That's true. Well—

BL:

I took Overton. Overton Experiment Station just out of Longview. But they're getting thirty five, forty inches of rainfall.

DM:

That's right.

BL:

First year I was out here I was in a post office and some of them said something, and I told them I'd moved from no rainfall to thirty five or forty inches. There it is.

DM:

How much rainfall would you get in Lee County?

BL:

In Lee County?

DM:

Is that about ten?

BL:

Ten or twelve. First year I was there, it was over a year before I got a rain.

DM:

Oh no.

BL:

I was—

DM:

Bet you were wondering! [laughter]

BL:

Of course I'd known that. But these cattle out here are bigger, stronger. But that year I was telling you about, I didn't get a rain until I guess in September, and it's the most grass I've ever had for going into winter. Man, that grass it was ready to grow. Boy it just shot up. It'll make a believer out of you.

DM:

Well that's the amazing thing about that kind of county. You get that rain, and—pow—it really takes off.

BL:

Oh, yeah. It's stout. Cattle get bigger.

DM:

Now what kind of cattle were you raising when you first started down in Leon County?

BL:

I moved down to Leon County. Of course I was Hereford man. I come from out here where everything is Hereford. I owned an auction down there for a while. I had an interest in an auction.

DM:

Down in Leon County?

BL:

Yeah. Just started and now it's one of the biggest auctions down there.

DM:

Okay. Well somewhere along the way you left there in '73, didn't you?

BL:

What did you say?

DM:

Didn't you leave down there in 1973?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay. By the time—were you still Hereford in '73?

BL:

Well when I first went down there I wanted Herford.

DM:

Right.

BL:

Well I just had that five hundred and something acres. I put thirty something cows in there, I think. It may have been forty. But a Brahman bull jumped into my pasture. I got eight heifer calves crossbred. And they dock you so on them long ears and things that I just kept them. And then they had their calves, so I went and got me some Brahman bulls.

DM:

Okay. You liked the calves then?

BL:

Oh my lord. My calves that were crossbred, that'd outrun—outweigh those other calves eighty pounds the same age.

DM:

Well were you one of the first people to use crossbreeds down there? Were other people doing that?

BL:

I guess. I don't know.

DM:

All because a Brahma bull got in the pasture.

BL:

But that hybrid bigger—there's something to it. And if you're after that out here they went to black baldies. You know that's the hybrid bigger. They didn't know it but that's what they like. But I came out here and I was—I moved my cattle. After I was out here a while I thought I'd go back to Herefords. I turned around and went down—well went to Cherokee Ranch out of Tyler. Bought some bulls. I'd keep enough Herefords to keep the herd going and I run crossbred out here. I had a fellow stop me at the bank—it was real funny that I was bringing my cattle from east Texas—and I'm shipping them out before I got out. I was at the post office at Crossroads, and he said, "I want to apologize to you." And I said, "Well what about?" He said, "I laughed at those cows when they was unloading them up there. Made fun of them. That is the damndest bunch of calves I ever saw." [laughter] And I had some calves that—the buyer was down there and he'd say, "that one looks like little bitty ears or something." And I'd say, "Yeah. Ain't it good?" And you know what it essentially was, they'd dock thunder out of ear or little hump. They don't want it to hump because that's a little too much. But they'd just dock them until they found that. And I'd say, "Yeah, ain't it good?" And he'd say, "Well it was good while it lasted." I asked him—I said, "Why did you want to dock him? Because he'll gain more and he'd be stouter all the way—won't get diseases or anything. Why are you wanting to dock him?"

DM:

That's just that old traditional thought, I guess. Purebred thought.

BL:

Yeah. Well everybody—when I first went down there Brahmans is—Hudgins had awful good bulls. It was down on the coast. And I had some Hudgins bulls.

DM:

Well now when you got out to Lee County you said you brought your cattle from Leon County. Did they have any trouble adapting at all? They'd grown up in that other kind of country? Did you see any problems?

BL:

I had trouble with bulls I bought.

DM:

You did?

BL:

But the trouble I had—and they'd freeze out here. And so I called it a "bull trap". I put them in there, and they could get in under the shed.

DM:

These were the Hudgins bulls that came up from the coast?

BL:

Well and the Cherokee from Tyler. They just—

DM:

Weren't prepared for that kind of high cold.

BL:

Well it's—they hadn't got higher like these others. And my crossbred cattle—I liked to save some that's got a little more hair.

DM:

Right. Well out in your Lee County ranch—Crossroads Ranch—is that what you called it? "Crossroads Ranch"?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

What all kind of mix did you have? You had Hereford, you had some Brahma in there. Did you have some Angus in there also? What kind of mix did you have?

BL:

Uh-uh. I never—when I had the auction they called them Herefords, “feather necks”, when they come in, because they’d bring more money. Of course they wouldn’t weigh near as much down there, and these boys would bring them out here. But just like there was Brahmans—if they hadn’t jumped my pasture I wouldn’t have known all that. Out here a Hereford would do good. But the crossbreds still do better. I kept me two or three Brahmans. Let me show you one of my bulls.

DM:

Okay, yeah. Pause this a second.

BL:

Let’s see if I can find it. [Pause in recording]

DM:

You were talking about Coastal Bermuda down there in Leon County. What kind of grass—what were the main grasses out there in Lee County?

BL:

I think we had some blue stem, and just really native Bermuda, and—but not much in the pastures. To tell you the truth I went down there at a pretty good time because see all of these places that was open they had gone. And they’d farmed it to death. You go down there and you put a little fertilizer but I was watching that Bermuda. I was teaching G.I. I got a job teaching G.I. school down there.

DM:

Teaching what?

BL:

G.I school.

DM:

G.I. school. Oh okay. Down in was that in Buffalo?

BL:

Yeah. And after I moved out on the ranch we’d had the Coastal. I’d go out and the only people that had that coastal was doctors or something. And my saying, well you spread green dollars over that land and make it green. But after I got sold on it they said that anytime you hear something that’s better than Coastal or as good as Coastal you can bet your bottom dollars that that Coastal is pretty good. I cleaned off some land where that house is. You can see the house

from a distance. It was up on a hill. I cleaned that hill up. It wasn't good deep land. And I planted Coastal. It's across from the house that I was living in. It's a shack is what it was. But my dad had come to see me, and it'd be a runner going out. We'd put a stick or a match there. Something just stick it in the ground. Next day about that time go out there and it was growing up to here.

DM:

Five inches or so.

BL:

That runner was running that far a day. You put fertilizer on it, man it'll—But now this fellow over here at Brownfield he had—wasn't Coastal, it was Bermuda—I had the name just before I—I tell you don't ever get old.

DM:

[laughter] I know what that's like. Right on into—

BL:

He quit farming cotton and planted that, and got him cattle, and was running. My cousin here—he wanted me to go out and I went out here in Lubbock, and they had a patch of that Bermuda, and had a bunch of old half tanks around, you know. It was doing—they just as bad as they can be. And had a herd of them out there. I went and looked in that tank. They had Milo—Hammered Milo cottonseed mill and cotton seed hub. Well I was feeding out a bunch and that's what I was feeding them in the lot. And they was—the grass was this tall. Midland. Midland Bermuda. And see it won't—Coastal out here will winter kill. Down there it's not as bad of a winter. But anyway this fellow that had it in Brownfield had his farm, quit farming, and put those cattle in there. About three or four years later he plowed it up and put it back in the farm.

DM:

Oh is that right? Huh. Okay.

BL:

So the Coastal's a little better than the Midland, but the Midland stands cold weather better.

DM:

Yeah. So the Coastal will die out in the winter out here.

BL:

I think Coastal came. I used to know for sure, but I think it came from Africa.

DM:

But it just doesn't quit stand up to this higher altitude—this colder weather out here?

BL:

Yeah. But boy it was good down there.

DM:

Did you have any predators down there in Leon County that would get your calves?

BL:

We every once in a while—what I did, I bought some sheep. Put sheep in there. I had about two thousand goats—those long haired goats. When they did, we got coyotes.

DM:

Coyotes would get them? What about out in Lee County? Did you have predators out there?

BL:

Oh, we had coyotes. I never lost any. I lost—coyotes will kill a calf, though. The coyote is a cowardly animal. They go and it's got to be two or three of them or they run.

DM:

I know they'll eat the afterbirth, too.

BL:

Yeah, they sure will. And they'll eat your dead animals. I always put poison on my dead animals.

DM:

What about—did you ever have any mountain lions out on that Lee County ranch?

BL:

Uh-uh. It's a little bit far in.

DM:

Did you ever have any golden eagles? Those big old eagles?

BL:

Yeah. We had eagles.

DM:

Would they get a calf every now and then?

BL:

I never had one.

DM:

But you said you had—

BL:

I hired an Indian to work for me, and he noticed those eagles. I didn't know until—we'd had a fellow going from—to Lovington out at Plains, cutting across there, and shot a hawk. And boy they fined him and everything. This Indian could kill an eagle for one feather, and he'd get the feather and stick it in there. He stole a bunch of stuff from me. Left. I was in Albuquerque. When I got back they had him in jail over at Morton. He was going through there. I went over there. They was keeping him there. Had him working around for those laws [?] [01:41:34]. But he had—I had a jar I'd put change in, and he had his pockets just pulled down. He had my pickup.

DM:

He stole your pickup?

BL:

Yeah, while I was there. He was leaving. He told me that he was going to pick up—he called another Indian to come and he was going to pick him up in Oklahoma.

DM:

But they caught him somewhere along the way?

BL:

Yeah, I got it all back. But the laws over there, until they found out who I was, was really on his side. But they had him. They'd take him out and work. His name was Bear Nose.

DM:

Bear Nose?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

Like a bear? B-e-a-r Nose. Golly. Huh. Now you said you had antelope out there.

BL:

Had a lot of antelope.

DM:

Did you ever—did they mix in with your cattle when you were trying to get your cattle together?
I've heard that sometimes antelope would be in with—

BL:

You mean people?

DM:

I've heard that sometimes when you would round up cattle out in that country that you'd get an antelope in with your cattle. Did you ever see that?

BL:

I can see where it would.

DM:

Did they hang pretty close to your cattle sometimes?

BL:

Yeah. Oh yeah. We had one out there that was solid white.

DM:

Really?

BL:

Yeah. Albino.

DM:

Golly. Never seen one of those.

BL:

But she had a kid nearly every year, and she never had another albino.

DM:

That's got to be awfully rare. Now when you were in Leon County it was deer, wasn't it?

BL:

When I got to Leon County there wasn't any. I'll tell you a little funny story about it. I was living in Buffalo and it's a bunch of rice farmers come down. I'd gotten to where you'd see a deer all come out or see the tracks or something. I tell you get your bunch of goats—get your two thousands—and put them in there on about eleven hundred acre woods, and those deer hunters

go crazy with them goats. [laughter] But these was rice farmers from down the alley. They come up here one Sunday—up to my house in Buffalo—and I was leasing this Dodson place. I should've bought. But they wanted—they was hunting a deer lease. I took them out because I'd see deer every once in a while. I'm in line and oh it was dry. I was paid two hundred and fifty dollars for that lease. I thought, "Boy if I could get my money back it sure would be—". But anyway we went out there, and I was in the Jeep and there was two of them in the back and one up there with me. I'm in the Army Jeep. Had a little brass shower. Just flash, you know, rain. Just enough to make it steam up. We'd come up to the gate and he got out to open the gate to get off the main county road, and we was going into the pasture. All was woods about from here to the kitchen there. Then it was a big open field, and woods clung to the line on the other side. I got in, this fellow got out to open the gate, and a big old doe stepped up in that lane right up there, and they got excited. I was hollering. "How much? How much? How much?" I said, "Five hundred dollars." They said, "We'll take it." [laughter]

DM:

That doe got you a lot of money. That's a nice doe.

BL:

But they killed seven or eight deer.

DM:

Oh, did they now? That was white tail deer down there, I guess. White tail deer?

BL:

Yeah.

DM:

Now did you have mule down there at Lee?

BL:

There was mule deer out there. But I never did lease them. I got the leasing, got to where a deer leasing—When I left I was paying for my winter feed with deer leases. I had eight camps.

DM:

I think these big ranches—

BL:

Where's that green book? Did I take it back in yonder?

DM:

You might have. But I know that—

BL:

Did you see that picture in there of those deer?

DM:

I'll look. I did. Oh, yeah, I saw them hanging there.

BL:

Yeah. That was one of my camps.

DM:

Well you know a lot of the ranches in—

BL:

What'd you say?

DM:

Nowadays a lot of the ranches in central Texas—that's pretty much all they do is deer lease.

BL:

Oh yeah. It's terrible what they get. [Knocking noise]

DM:

There's Sam. [Pause in recording] Yeah, but that deer leasing is a big deal down there now.

BL:

Oh it's gravy. And you know I didn't get nothing like they get now. At my living you get three or four thousand dollars a gun, but now they—

DM:

People spend a lot for that. Now you said when you went down there, there weren't very many deer. But that changed while you were down there, I guess.

BL:

Oh yes. When I got there I didn't know—I don't think there was any.

DM:

Why not? Why is that?

BL:

They just hadn't made it down there. First deer I heard of in that country was in Montgomery County down by Houston. But it got to where I'd see deer now and then. I'd see their tracks. Before I left I could count sometimes thirty around my house.

DM:

Isn't that something? Well I'll tell you this, you can't drive after dark anymore down there. You'll hit one, you know. You'll just hit one.

BL:

I run into an antelope one time.

DM:

You did?

BL:

I was in high school. I was in the Elray's [01:48:13] car. I was going in Fort Sumner. Going out to a ranch. And one jumped out right in front of me. Knocked the light out of mine. He got up and took off.

DM:

Golly! I've seen them on the road when it's fenced on both sides, and they won't jump those fences. Just go back and forth.

BL:

They won't jump. They crawl under. I used to get them on—crowd them in my pickup.

DM:

I've been told that they're real curious.

BL:

What?

DM:

I've been told that they're real curious, and that they'll keep their distance, but if there's something like a little flag waving—something like that—they've got to come up and see what it is. Have you seen that?

BL:

No, I haven't. But I imagine I can see it. [laughter]

DM:

Well it's getting pretty close to twelve o'clock now. So I've been here about two and a half hours. I guess I'll go ahead and close this down, but I might want to come back and talk to you some more. Can I?

BL:

You can anytime you want to. I'm enjoying this.

DM:

I'll give you call.

BL:

I'm enjoying just visiting and remembered.

DM:

Yeah. I know that there's some more things that's I could ask you, because I love to talk about ranching and hear about ranching especially. But I'll go ahead and shut it down today. I'll go ahead and turn it off here.

[End of Recording]

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