

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Dick Buxton-Experiences of WWI

By Dick Buxton

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Box 1 Folder 21

Oral Interview conducted by Theron Josephson

Transcribed by Heather Mattson December 2004

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This is an Oral History made by Theron Josephson. I am interviewing Dick Buxton.

TJ: Could you spell that last name for me?

DB: B-U-X-T-O-N

TJ: Is your real name Dick Buxton?

DB: No.

TJ: What is it?

DB: Well, it's Darrell. It's kind of unusual how I got my name. I'll have to tell. Back in the time when I was born, back in 1897, my father lived down in Eureka, Utah, that's where he was born, and he come to the family, I had two sisters and two brothers older than I was, and he said, "You kids run off and play to the neighbors today. You can be gone all day if you want." So when they came home, the first thing he said to them was, "Come on in and see your brother, Dick." So they all came in and seen their little brother, Dick, but they didn't like the name, but Dick stayed with him all the rest of his life.

TJ: How many brothers and sister do you have?

DB: I had three brothers and three sisters. Seven in the family with myself.

TJ: were they all older than you?

DB: No, there is a sister and a brother younger. The rest are older.

TJ: What day did you say you were born?

DB: May 22, 1897, in Eureka, Utah.

TJ: When did you come up to the Teton Basin?

DB: Well, my father went to that country from Cache Valley. He left beautiful country and soil. He was induced to go down there by a real estate man who was in kind of developing that country down in the Deseret Country, down in Utah. He had a new project for water, but it turned out to be so alkali they just had to give it up. The old-timers, they starved out, and my father went to work in the mines down in Eureka and earned enough money to come back to the Teton Basin in about 1900.

TJ: So this was about when you were three?

DB: I was about three years old then. My brother, Orville, was born two years after that. Born in 1902. My father homesteaded out on Badger Creek. It was pretty hard old times

those days and my father, in 1904, he went up to get timber north of the East Creek on what they called "Dry Ridge" on the 19th of December and was accidentally killed. He evidently loaded his load and left his team standing at the bottom of a hollow and went on the hill to load up a load for the next day and seen a pretty good sized dry tree about 12 to 14 inches thick. It was evidently twisted, and his attention must have been on the team he had left standing in a road at the bottom of the hollow, He was on the side hill. He left the outside tugs hooked and tied the lineup tight. IT seems that it must have got him with a kind of twist it had on the stump. After that, my mother went back to Utah till I was about 18 years old. Then my brothers and I came back up in to this country in about 1916. Then we worked as Buxton Brothers for a few years till we were married. I worked for my uncle and my granddad. At that time I was 18, and I remember one year I fed his cattle. I hauled the first load of straw out on a big rack. In those days, it was just out of the old straw stack. The rack was none feet wide by eighteen feet long. I hauled two loads a day, about twice a week I'd get a half a jag of hay and haul to cattle to kind of supplement them and to keep them conditioned up a little. I did this for \$35 a month and my room and board. Quite a difference than it is now. It seemed like \$35 dollars a day is poor wages.

TJ: Where did you and your brother settle when you came back?

DB: We settled over on the west side of the valley in what they call Bates, Teton Valley. My Granddad kind of helped us get a little start and finance us on the place. In fact it's the place I've lived on all my life there. I was the one that finally took it over. When we worked as Buxton Brother's, it was really quite a treat to us to work together as brothers. Hen we were kids, we just never had that privilege of working together. We were really happy for that. We worked together until about 1923 when we were married. Clint, my brother, and I and then we dissolved partnerships.

TJ: Did your mother stay down in Utah?

DB: No, my mother came back up a year or two after we did. But she was a young mother at the time she was left alone. It was a pretty hard old role for her. They didn't have these social security pensions and stuff they do now. We learned how to root for a living. She was a wonderful mother. In 1914, she took a course in nursing g inn Salt Lake and came back. She spent the rest of her life nursing. She ran a maternity home here in Driggs after she came back here. She was a wonderful mother.

TJ: Were you on that farm when the war broke out?

DB: Yeah, We were running it, my brothers and I. But at that time I was working for my uncle and my grandfather. My older brother, Clint, went in the very first draft that left Teton Valley. That was in 1917. I think in September, but I wasn't of age for the first draft. The second draft came in when I was 21, and they drafted all those that year. I was in the first draft of that group. I went into the army in August, 1918.

TJ: What was your reaction to Pres. Wilson? Did you like him?

DB: Oh yes. I thought he was a great president. He was a wonderful president. Of course, back in those times, political life was a lot like it is now. He had his friends and his foes, so Wilson was a wonderful man though a lot of people were kind of opposed to what he did. Said that he pulled us into war, but I'm sure he didn't. He was a whole-hearted American. It's quite an experience for us young people. You know in those days after the war started, the people were really patriotic. A soldier wasn't so common as they are now. In those days you never seen a soldier out in civilian life. When we went to the army, we were sent off with a great ceremony from people here. They'd give us all a dance and a big sendoff; and when we came home, they did the same way. It seemed like the people were so patriotic in those days. It seems so different after this Vietnam trouble.

TJ: Do you remember when Pres Wilson called for volunteers? Did anyone volunteer or were they all drafted?

DB: They called for volunteers, but they just couldn't supply. They drafted them. And my brother, as I say, went in the first draft. They left this country about 20 of them the same time.

TJ: Pres. Wilson said that he would keep us out of war. Do you remember how he go in to it? Did he back down on is word?

DB: I'm sure Pres. Wilson didn't get us into it. It's a little faint on my mind right now. I know that one of our ships were attacked when it was shipping supplies to our allies over there. Of course, they weren't our allies then, but the people- we kind of favored the British and the French. I just can't tell you. You will have to know more about history to find out just exactly how that happened. I'm convinced that Wilson never done any wrong that caused that. I'm sure that he was a real honest and patriotic American. Hw was a wonderful President. I think that if we could have followed the principles that Pres. Wilson had at that time; and after the war I've always had a gelling that things could have been different. It couldn't have been built up world- wide as it was. He was the one that started the League of Nations. He was voted out on it; and I'm sure that if we could have has a good Leagues of Nations according to the way it was his desire to do, why it would have been a lot different. Quickly after that, World War II built up.

TJ: Do you remember Idaho's governor at the time?

DB: I remember Idaho's governor. I think it was Alexander, but I don't remember too much about him cus I was a young fellow at the time in my late teens-twenties. He was a good man I guess, as far as I knew. But I do remember Senator Borah. He was a real outstanding man. I remember when I was in my basic training in California. We had a real big group out to hear him talk. He was a very prominent man at the time. He stayed in Idaho politics til he dies. If I remember, after the first term or two he never had any opposition. The other party wouldn't run a man against him.

TJ: When you were drafted, you said you spent your basic training in California?

DB: Yes, I spent my basic training at Camp Fremont, California. After about three months training, I left for the port of embarkation. We went by train quite a different mode of travel than it is now. It took about seven night and eight days to go from California to Long Island, New York. Pretty slow, and after that we stayed in Camp Mills on Long Island. They had to have us around there. We didn't know what we was going to do. We just read from the papers, and things were getting a little in our favor over in the war overseas. The Armistice was signed while we were still in that camp. We stayed in there for about a month. Then we went to camp Lee Virginia for the rest of the winter. We were released from the army in the spring of 1919.

TJ: Was this the Army?

DB: Yes, it was the infantry.

TJ: What rank did you get?

DB: I as a first class private.

TJ: So how long were you in the army before you were released?

DB: From August till April. About seven or eight months. Not very long, just kind of feel like a tin soldier. Not like the boys that got it I tell you. There were a lot of others that got it.

TJ: How did you like the army?

DB: I can't say I was in love with it, but I thought that it was a great experience for me, though. It was something I'd never had before. I'd always been a kid on the farm all my life. It just was something different. The fist airplane I ever saw was when I went in Camp Fremont, California. It was one of those old double wings. I remember the first time it flew over my head when we first got down there. It looked like it was only going about ten miles an hour. Pretty slow, but pretty noisy. After we got back East, around in Camp Mills, where the Wright Brothers made their airfield, there was a lot of activities in planes there. It's kind of like horse travel compared to today. Kind of like the old horse now compared with the modern equipment the mechanized way of farming.

TJ: How did you like your commanding officer?

DB: Wonderful!

TJ: What was his name, do you remember?

DB: My commanding officer's name was Captain Countryman. He was wonderful man. He was always out for us. I'll have to tell you a little story on that. I mentioned it took us seven nights and eight days. We was on the train actually that long, and we would get off the train a little while each day and exercise if we had the change. We'd traveled

three days when Capt. Countryman sent orders for us to get ready to get off. We were going to have a little time off in Peru, Indiana. There were two companies on the train. Each company had about 250 men to a company. Our company commander was always looking out for us, and he gave us orders to get ready to get out clothes and get off the train. We took a shower at the Wright Air Base. Anyway we had time for all our company to run through it. The other company commander, Capt O'Toole, seen what we was doing and got his men to get ready; but by the time they got ready we were through and they had to get back on. So we praised our Captain for that; and as soon as we got to Long Island, New York- we got there just after-dark they had tents there, and we had to unfurl our tents and put them up and get our bedding and our equipment all in them. Then we had a pretty nice little supper. The other company was always right along beside of us- of course, in different quarters. About ten o'clock we heard the old whistle blow up at company F. Their captain ordered them out to get their clothes and go up to the Curtis Air Plane- their headquarters anyway- where they took a bath anyway. About all it was was a high board fence and about four showers coming up in the middle. It was cold water. That was in the latter part of October, and it was pretty doggone cold. I'll tell you it was real cold. They were pretty unhappy about it-those young fellows were, and the next morning we got up, we had our breakfast, and policed up our streets. Our Company Captain called us out to get ready to get our clothes and go up to the same place- no not the same place. We went to the Curtis Air Base where we had a nice warm shower and everything. Anyway our Captain was a real good man.

TJ: So a lot of how much you like the army depended on your commanding officer?

DB: A lot of it I'm sure. An officer can either make a pleasant or unpleasant for you. If you're willing to do the things you should, most of them are good. Some of them are just different though. I don't know why. Those two captains seemed like they had the same opportunities, but there was a lot of different feelings in the companies about the two men.

TJ: What was the feeling in your company like? Did some of them really want to go to war or did others of them hate it or what?

DB: Well I'll tell you. Our company was made up of farm boys like myself. A lot from Idaho and a lot from Oklahoma. Some from the rural areas of California. I don't think that there were any that was anxious to get to war, but they was anxious and willing to go and do their part in it. They just wanted to do what they should.

TJ: What was the feeling of the people around your home? Were they all behind the war?

DB: Oh, you bet. There was a lot of patriotism that time.

TJ: Were you married before you went?

DB: No.

TJ: When did you start going with your wife?

DB: Oh, Theron, I had to wait for her to grow up. She was a little gal, I thought a lot of when she was little. I was only eight year older than her. I started going with her at about 1922. We were married in 1923, but I knew her all the time. I knew what I was getting. She knew what she was getting. She has been a wonderful gal. We just celebrated our golden wedding anniversary two weeks ago.

TJ: Congratulations!

TJ: What was your reaction when the Armistice was signed?

DB: Camp Mills just went wild. Of course, the whole country went wild, but we were soon put down by our officers. They told us to act like soldiers not kids. And we went to our quarters and kept kind of quiet. They was orders, and we obeyed them. But there was a lot of people that was blowing horns and tootin railroad whistles and bells. A lot of them just going wild all around there.

TJ: Did you think you were going overseas before the Armistice was signed?

DB: Yes, we all knew we were headed for there. Of course, we all said they seen us coming and decided to quit.

TJ: You must have been right.

DB: Well, I'll tell you, there was a lot to do that. We had a lot more back here than old Germany though we did. Some good men too.

TJ: So you were released in 1918 in the spring?

DB: 1919. I went in in 1918 and was released in the spring of 1919.

TJ: Do you remember about the flu epidemic?

DB: Yes, the flu was on at the time I was in the service, but I didn't see too much of the flu. They usually kept us pretty well quartered up there. There just wasn't very much flu. When I was gone, my mother she was a nurse in this valley as I mentioned. She spent a lot of time with people. She'd for right into a family. The whole family would be down. Two or three of them would die, but she was very fortunate. She never did get it. She done a lot of good for the people at that time. I'm pretty proud of her.

TJ: What did you do immediately after the war?

DB: My brothers and I had an opportunity to buy a piece of ground, about 400 acres plus what we had- about 600 acres; and we worked together as Buxton Brothers. We just

really had a good old time together. One thing we had never had the privilege of working together as brothers, because my mother had been left a widow and us kids had just been scattered from here and there where we could find work. We was quite successful in it. We farmed together until we got married. At least my brother and I got married. My brother, Clint, was already married. When we decided that it would be best to dissolve partnerships we were both married in 1923. When we were in partnerships, my brother Jack was only 12, and we took him in as a full fledged partner with us. I was 18 at the time. We started a partnership. Quite a difference in those days farming than it is now. There was a lot of horse work. We had about 25 or 30 horses. We done it the old hard way. We had the binder, the thrasher machines, and finally the header.

TJ: What were the headers like?

DB: They were considerable like a combine now. That is the header part of it. They were just about the same thing that is the knife and the sickle that they drove with six head of horses from the back. It has a sweep on it that was drove by three horses that turned straight out that would sweep it square out on the corners. Drive the header box along the side. The elevators would bring it up and put it on the header box. Have one man stacking the headings and one man driving the team. It was a lot easier than the old binders and bundles before that. I got a picture of that old header Henry Bates took for me. My brother, Jack, was on the load. It was quite interesting to see.

TJ: When they used thrashers, did you have your own thrashing machine?

DB: No, at that time there was about 3 to 4 thrashing machines that did the Bates district. They would thrash the whole year. It would take anywhere from 14 to 20 men for a crew to run one machine. We could always get enough help to run two or three machines, but now days to show you the contrast you can't hardly hire a man. One good combine can go out and do what a whole thrashing crew would in those days.

TJ: While you were in the service, who was running the farm?

DB: My older brother and my younger brother. They were home.

TJ: Did they deliberately increase production for the war?

DB: Well, they done all they could. Everybody just raised all they could. I don't know how they could deliberately do it. They encouraged people to produce all we could.

TJ: What was your community life like in those days?

DB: Oh, it was wonderful. You know if we had more of that now days, it would be a better world. We used to help each other in our harvesting. We had to. We visited each other so much. We would have surprise parties. You know sometime we would go in on a couple. I'll have to tell you a little story about a man in one of these parties up on the East side. They come around to give him a surprise party. He was about ready to go to

bed. He was standing there in his shirt tails with his pants off and his long-tailed underwear on and getting the shavings for the next morning for the stove. We threw the door open and yelled "Surprise!" We used to catch them in ways like that. It was really fun, but we never knew who was going to get it. It was a good wholesome life together. Now take in the fall of the year, we used to work together getting in wood. We didn't have these nice modern furnaces we have nowadays. It was all coal or wood. Of course, we could get coal up at the Brown Bear Mine up here west of us about ten miles. We would get together, especially this group over there in Mahogany and go up early in the fall of the year and get some tree and lay them across the creek and cover them some pine bows and when it would snow that was our bridge. You could drive right over it. Then we would go and hunt up some dry wood. It was kind of hard to find dry timber. We worked together. I'll have to tell you one on your grandfather (Ephraim Jopsephson). We had worked hard, and you remember just below the forks of Mahogany where there used to be road and the creek washing it out. Do you remember the place? You have to go out around trail now.

TJ: Yes, the Forks of Mohogany?

DB: The forks of Mohogany, just below them. Well, anyway going around that your grandfather, he was a great old fellow, sure thought a world of him, he slid off of there and tipped over. Boy, we had worked hard all day, way up North Fork in the timber, and we was wet clean to the waist and his old sleigh went about ten feet over the bank into the creek. Oh, your granddad looked at it and he said, "Well, by golly." I never heard him say a bad work in his life.

TJ: How many kids did you have?

DB: We had four boys.

TJ: How long did you remain farming out in Bates?

DB: We farmed till 1964. My wife, Mary, and I moved to town and Jay Dell took over. Mary done everything there was to do on a farm. She helped go out and help the cows calve. Everything else there was for us to do. Milk cows and run the old horse-driven spud cultivator. That's another thing I didn't mention. I raised spuds on that farm almost all my life. I was one of the first ones in Teton Valley to raise certified seed potatoes.

TJ: Now they're pretty famous out there.

DB: Yes.

TJ: Jay Dell is my youngest boy. He took over my farm, and he got a well in. I was always a little short water, quite short. He got a real good well that tests out at 2200 gallons a minute. So the dry farm I had down below is now all top irrigated stuff. He raises about 150 acres of spuds a year, and all the grain and hay he needs to feed in the

winter. He has about 140 head of cow stuff. It turned out to be real good farm. We moved to town in 1964 over to the place where we are now in Driggs.

TJ: You originally got your water from Mahogany Creek?

DB: Yes.

TJ: What water rights did you have?

DB: We had what we always considered second right on the creek. Third right was what it was, but we usually got a little low in the fall of the year and didn't have enough to finish out potatoes on it. We would water hay earlier in the year.

TJ: How did you get water rights? Do you remember how they came about, how you filed on them?

DB: Yes, you filed for your water right when you filed on your ground. It was deeded right to your ground. Thomas Bates was the old original first settler in there, and he got the first right. He filed on the water an inch to the acre on what ground he had. It would be 160 inches of water to a quarter section.

TJ: You remained farming till 1964?

DB: Yes, and continued on till now. I don't amount to much now, but I go out and help my boy out. He likes to have me. I don't do much- only drive the tractors. Quite a difference now than it used to be then, those tractors. You can get out and do as much in one day as you could in a whole season.

TJ: What is your religion?

DB: I'm L.D.S. or commonly known as Mormon. I had a lot of activities in it, and I'm pretty proud of my religion. I served pretty much all our lives in it, my wife and I. We both help positions in the ward and the stake. I served about 12 years as Sunday School Superintendent in the little Bates Ward over there. Then I was in the Teton Stake High Council and served about 12 years in it. Then I put about 8 years in as bishop of the Bates Ward. At that time we built a chapel. The church paid 60% and us 40% is the way I think it was at that time. To get our quota of it, we were to furnish the timber and do the work, was the big thing. So we organized in our ward and Sterling Murdock and I were on the committee to get the timber out-see about getting a stamp by the ranger. Anyway, we had everything all ready and arranged for it, and we had these roads built just like I told you. When the snow came, we had a pretty good road up there. A little steep in places. Then when the time was ready, we called the ward out, and we cut 26,000 feet and hauled it out in six days- just one week. The ward all turned out 100 percent, and we all had teams. That was quite a thing we were quite proud of.

TJ: Where was the church houses built?

DB: It was built on my place that I owned- right across from the schoolhouse, right in the central part of the ward.

TJ: Did you give them the ground?

DB: Yes, I gave them an acre of ground to build on.

TJ: How long did it take to make the building after you got the boards hauled down?

DB: We had it going by the following fall. We dedicated it in '41, but we were using it in the fall of 1940. I think it was. Just in one summertime building it. We hired a supervisor to kind of oversee it, and then the people turned out and did most of the work under the supervisor. The church pretty well furnished all the cash, and we furnished all the labor and the material- the native lumber to build it with so it didn't hurt anybody.

TJ: How do you like your life over in Driggs now?

DB: Oh, its pretty good life. It's kind of hard after you've had an active all your life. You don't have much to do, but we do a lot. I go out to the old farm all the time in the summertime especially and help out a lot and pass then time away. Got a lot of good friends here.

TJ: I imagine your son appreciates that.

DB: Well, he'd better! My other two sons- one is a doctor down in Roosevelt, Utah, and the other has an insurance agency in Bountiful, Utah. All fine sons. I have one, one is deceased.

TJ: Well, thanks for your time Mr. Buxton, and thanks for this interview.

DB: It's been a pleasure Theron.

TJ: Okay, thank you.