

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Lester Belnap-Experiences of WWI

By Lester Belnap

December 7, 1973

Box 1 Folder 11

Oral Interview conducted by Steven Yamada

Transcribed by Kurt Hunsaker December 2004

Brigham Young University- Idaho

This is Oral History. I am Steven Yamada. Today is December 7, 1973. I am going to interview Mr. Lester Belnap. The general topic today will be Agriculture.

SY: Mr. Belnap, could you tell us where you were born?

LB: Hooper, Utah, Weber County, Hooper, Utah.

SY: When?

LB: In 1888.

SY: Where were your parents born?

LB: My father was born in Utah, in a little town of Springfield, and my mother was born in Hooper, Utah, Weber County, Utah.

SY: What was your occupation?

LB: Agriculture, Farming, and Ranching.

SY: Could you tell us a little about your homestead?

LB: In 1910, I homesteaded a 160 acres north of Moreland out in what we call the desert. I proved up on that seven years later, that was my first piece of ground.

SY: When the President at that time declared war for the United States to go into World War I, what were some of your reactions towards his getting the United States involved? Do you think it was justified?

LB: Yes, I do. The indications were that after the sinking of the Lusitania by the German people that it appeared that they were trying to subdue the whole world. I think that we were honorably justified in joining the other nations in defeating their purpose.

SY: What were some of the reactions of this community towards going into war?

LB: Well, it was community accepted. We went into a necessity where we had to raise more wheat. I was registered for the draft, but I was deferred because of my farming operations; and I planted wheat. I was married at the time and had two children, and for that reason I was deferred.

SY: Can you tell us how many acres of wheat you raised?

LB: I think it was about twenty acres at that time.

SY: when the war was declared, was there a panic in the community there?

LB: No, not necessarily. There was some concern, of course, cause the boys all had to be drafted, and it was quite a major concern, because they were drafting a lot of boys, and they were going over there in ships, and there was a terrific loss of ships and supplies and personnel because the Germans were pretty well-qualified with a quantity of submarines, and that was the worst obstacle we had of getting over there. But the government organized, well-organized convoys that got through; but in spite of that, we did lose a lot of ships and supplies. But after they organized convoys and going in convoys and being escorted by destroyers. (The tape is turned off.) When the government organized the shipping system that furnished them so many destroyers to go along with the supplies and the convoys were taking the soldiers over, there was less losses, but there were several losses, fatalities, that resulted in German submarines in destroying the ships. The main concern our people joining the Allies of Europe, the indication was that the Kaiser was intending to conquer the world. And further that when he had conquered Europe, his next move was to conquer the United States or the American continent, and that of course was the main idea why we thought that we should join our Allies and sustain them in defeating the purpose of the Kaiser.

SY: Mr. Belnap, you said that you had a big family?

LB: At that time when the war broke out in 1914, I think we had three children at the time.

SY: And you said you had some brothers that were drafted?

LB: I had one brother that was drafted.

CY: Could you tell us his name please?

LB: It was Wilford Belnap, my younger brother. And he lives at the present time in Bountiful.

SY: What were some of your feeling towards your brothers being drafted?

LB: Well, generally speaking, that it was unavoidably necessary to protect and preserve our nation.

SY: DO you remember your parent's reaction to your brother's going?

LB: No, I'll tell you why. Oh yes, I will put it this way. My father was in sympathy with the declaration of war. For he was just as patriotic as anybody else, and he was in sympathy with the declaration of war and concurred with it. Father was getting along in years then and his activity was limited. That stuff, it was really my generation and those who was no too far from me that was more concerned than anybody else. But there was a good patriotic spirit, let's put it that way Steve. There was a good patriotic spirit throughout the entire nation. Steve, I went when soldiers left. I sang songs many and many a time to their farewell. We give 'em farewells, they wasn't just drafted and took.

When two or more boys were drawn out of Moreland, we got together as a community and put on a program and give 'em a send off. And the central organizations like county people, they gave 'em farewell testimonials. The people were deliberately patriotic, very patriotic – put it that way. More untied than they at any other time, I never seen before. I was too young to remember the Spanish American War much, but I lived through it as a kid, but there hasn't been a war since that time, where the people were united as they were in World War I.

SY: What do you think caused the people to be united?

LB: The defense of our own freedom was at stake. It actually was at stake. Steve, those German people had that foolish idea that same that Napoleon had to conquer the world, and they did it when Hitler came up with it. The same idea that he was going to conquer the world. And we had to be on the defensive in every one of the wars – World War I, World War II, and World War – this war in Vietnam that we had. We were really on the defensive. We were fighting communism, that's what never has been a time when we have been the aggressors. Our wars have all been on the defensive. World War I exceeded in patriotic unity – the people were more untied and more patriotic that they have ever been. We used to celebrate the 4th of July as something more sacred than what the people do nowadays. They just pertnear forgot it. Ever since communism has been intensified through the world, our patriotism has deteriorated to a lower standard than it was in the time of World War I. Not too much but somewhat, let's put it that way, somewhat deteriorated from what it was in World War I. There wasn't any demonstrations in World War I. Nothing that I know anything about. There were no demonstrations then.

SY: Did the people, I guess they couldn't be called demonstrations, but what were those Bond Drives like?

LB: Bond Drives, we had no problems with that . But include in this other one before we get onto the Bond Drive. Loyalty to each other and to our government. Write that down in your notes and then when you type this up you can write it out the way you want it. Story-form, that's what you're trying to do isn't it?

SY: No, it's your story. I'll type it just like it comes on this tape.

LB: That's what I mean. Like I was telling you the whole story. There was more loyalty, more devotion, and patriotism that there has been since. Demonstrations was unknown in World War I. I never knew anything about any demonstrations.

SY: What were some of the calls that the President at that time called out for the people to do?

LB: Woodrow Wilson was the president, wasn't he? Well, Woodrow Wilson was a very good President. He was a valiant leader. He was a very assuring to the people, but war was absolutely essential to join our Allies for our own protection as well as theirs. It was

eminent that our freedom, our liberty, and justice was at stake. The public recognized it and was very much united, very loyal, and patriotic. Our cause was justified definitely justified.

SY: Okay. Mr. Belnap, you said that you were married at that time, and you were homesteading in Moreland, and you raised wheat. Could you tell us some of the problems that you had at that time raising wheat?

LB: What was dry farm out there, that was the problem. We were minus quite a bit from, and I sold that place and bought an irrigated farm. Then I sold that place and bought another irrigated farm. This was 1914. By the time the war broke out, I had increased my farm capacity to 43 acres; and then I began to raise more wheat, and the country needed sugar beets because there was a shortage, and they asked for an increase in sugar beets so I raised them. I increased my farm from 20 acres of wheat and some barley and the balance in beets, so that made a difference. I wasn't a big farmer. I rent some ground too and that made a difference, but I don't think I need to go into that. But I increased my grain, and then I increased my farming with sugar beets which was also a necessity. The government called for increase in sugar production, and I went along with the government in that. That's when we begin to have labor problems. Maybe this is getting too lengthy. (Tape turned off.) Homesteaded and moved into an irrigated farm (that was a dry farm) and then we moved into an irrigated farm and began to raise sugar beets and grain too. And I got into that one here and then I went from that, and I got in here when I had 43 acres. That was when I began to increase the wheat; and in addition to that, the government asked for an increase in sugar beets, and then we began to raise sugar beets. V-Day, I think, was November 11, 1918. We was in it from 14 to 18, and I was digging beets when V-Day came on. The war was over. And boy, there was a celebration over the nation, too. I'm telling you, everybody – they was singing songs about when the boys some home, and they was coming home. And then they began to come home. (Tape turned off.) The people were very loyal to the bond-buying bonds. Some came out and made drives among the people, but they was very generously subscribe to the bonds. I had bonds. In those days, we didn't have too much money. Prices were not too high, and incomes for farmers were not too good. There wasn't much in it except wheat. We did get a good price for wheat. But things did come up a little for wheat, and beef and what not, and the people were very loyal to the campaigns for bonds. I know of two or three occasions when they came out to the country and asked, solicited people to buy bonds. We were loyal. A lot of people bought them and couldn't pay for them all at once, so they paid them in installments; and through the banks, they bought them and paid for them in installments. Loyalty and patriotism and united people were so united and interested and concerned about winning of the war that they made all sacrifices the people could to keep the government financed. They were patriotic to the utmost degree. They just volunteered and fell in with it and cooperated. They were in it heart and soul. They knew we were fighting a cause essential to our keeping our rights, our liberty, our freedom, and our nation intact, and to preserve what we had; and we just did not intend to lose it. We meant to keep it, and we did. And did what we could to keep it and was victorious in what we were doing. You will have to write that out. I just can't think of the word, you know, to grammatically finish my thoughts completely like I should do.

But in my judgment and my recollection there was never a demonstration that I know of against the government.

SY: What do you think about the demonstrations today?

LB: Since that time? Well, I think some of it was probably justified, but I think it was mostly a lack of understanding.

SY: DO you think the United States as a whole is not as loyal to the government?

LB: Not since the institution of communism has come into the country. Our concepts of patriotism and loyalty have not been well-preserved as they have been since World War I. I'm going to tell you why I think that. It's because the young people of today have opposing influences coming from other sources that doesn't originate among the American people. There is communistic influences that are among our people today that is responsible, very largely responsible, for the diversion of the people's influence is in here has captivated a lot of the thinking of the younger people, and they just plainly don't understand it. As far as the young people are concerned, they are just as good as people as they ever was, but they are just mixed up in their thinking, because of outside influence. (Tape turned off.) Well, I'm going to tell you what I seen now as an example. (Tape turned off.) What I have heard and seen on television. When the Communist Party and the United States came to an executive meeting, and they had to wait for a few minutes for the secretary, and I heard that man say that secretary, when he came and sat down, he said that we haven't had a demonstration in the United States that we haven't had a representative there. That was at a Communist Committee Session and that secretary made that statement, and I heard it. And that is the thing that is diverting some of our young people into these demonstrations, because they are under the influence of that foreign element. It isn't the people that gets them involved, it's because of that people's influence on them. I don't think we have to go 7,000 miles away to fight communism. It's right here among us. That's my attitude today. We've got it here among us. If I read the record right, they are even coming in here and taking out citizenship papers and getting themselves elected to positions where they can increase their influence over the people, and they're doing it. I think that we might, through our government, stimulate patriotism by trying to bring back the confidence and respect that we have in government before this communistic influence started to perpetuate our country. I don't know. We used to get I here on the 4th of July and celebrate. We had a house full of people that would listen to a program and some good orator would give us a lecture on our government and try to preserve it dignity and respect, for its dignity and respect is important. Today, they don't do nothing. Very few get out and celebrate the 4th of July anymore, Independence Day. I want to tell you this. I don't want it to go to Boise or anywhere else, but I sat up in here in the morning two years ago. The 4th of July came on a Sunday. They went ahead with the meeting, Sacrament meeting, just like it was any other Sunday; and when the service was over, that is the Sacrament was passed, I got on my feet down where I sat, and I said, "Bishop, this is the 4th of July. If we can't do anymore, let's stand up and sing the 'Star Spangled Banner', the national anthem." And he turned to the chorister and said, "Let's sing it." That 4th of July would have

passed just like any other day. Now I don't expect you to put that in there, put it in if you want to, but what does it show? Not to be disrespectful, that isn't it; but it is just complacency. We are not interested in that. We don't do much about it, neither in the schools nor in the churches, nor in any other organization. Maybe the war veterans does a little bit about it, but the general public has ceased form any demonstration of loyalty toward government. They don't have them orators. They don't have it brought before the kids anymore. I'm with these teenagers. I just tell you they're just fine people. I love 'em all, could learn a lot from teenagers. Steve, I sat here and read in the newspapers and in the journals and magazines that I get that alcohol is our number one enemy, and what are they doing about it? They are making it easier and easier all the time for the kids to get it. The worst drug on the market today is alcohol and the easiest to get. That ever occur to you? Well, it is. They even lowered the age from 21 to 18. At first they wasn't going to allow them to drink it. They could work in the bars, but they couldn't drink. Was that subtle? And then in a little while, they made it eligible to vote. They was eligible to participate in any of the adult practices. And now they come in here. They won't sell beer, but they got to carry it off of the premises and take it home to drink it. Now they are putting in plumbers. There was one going in here now in this new lot, Hailey is his name or something like that, and he talked to the city council and they are letting him have a license to sell beer. Well, they'll do that in that other place there. They don't let you carry it away. They are making it easier and easier all the time for the kids to get the worst that, our chemists and our Untied States laboratories say that alcohol is the worst drug that we have got; and the country is making it easier and easier for the kids to get it. (Tape turned off.) There may be number of things that should be mentioned, but the main thing I'd like to emphasize is that the people in World War I was willing to sacrifice, to work and preserve and to build anything that they could do and give for the preservati9on of our country and the principles for which it stands.

SY: I'd like to thank Mr. Belnap very much. This tape will be placed in the library at Ricks College for use by future researchers. Thank you.