

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Melvin Luke-Experiences of WWI

By Melvin Luke

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Box 2 Folder 13

Oral Interview conducted by Cindy Sagers

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This is an oral report. I am Cindy Sagers. Today is December 12, 1973. I'm going to interview Melvin Luke. The general topic will be World War I.

CS: Mr. Luke, where were you born?

ML: I was born in Manti, Utah, in 1883.

CS: How long did you live in Manti?

ML: I lived in Manti until I was six years of age.

CS: Where were your parents born?

ML: One was born in Manti, and one was born in Goshen, Utah.

CS: When did you come to Rexburg?

ML: In 1916.

CS: What has been some of your occupations?

ML: I graduated from the college at Logan in agricultural engineering. My occupation, of course, was the usage of canal water and river water. Taking care of them and such as pertaining to the irrigation part of the country. When I came to Rexburg, I taught at Ricks for three years- 1916, 1917, 1918. Then I went to Jefferson County and was county agent for four and one-half years. Since then I taught school eight years in the southern part of Jefferson County. Then I bought me a farm and used this irrigation control of waters in St. Anthony for 26 years. During these years now, World War came on. It has been so long ago now, I can't remember the details of what happened, but I know what a feeling we had because the terrific things which was happening in Europe. Hitler being a man of such great force, being able to control the feelings of people in such a way that they seemed to all flock to him and his great plans of destruction. Here in the United States, we loved peace and we wanted peace. But because of the great power that was exhibiting itself by Hitler and Mussolini in Italy, we became anxious that possibly it would be devastating- which it was. So of course, after some time of the great destruction that was going over there, I think our government could see that there was no hopes of England and France and the small countries ever handling Germany. SO something had to be done. Something united had to be done, so that we could save ourselves of the devastating conditions that was coming on. I remember how worried we were. I had a brother ready for the army, and we knew if he went over to Europe, it might be the last we would ever see of him. So of course, the whole country, I said, were upset. We didn't want to part with our boys. Our lives with them were so much happier here at home that to send them over there where we knew destruction was so devastating that the whole country was being swept over by that great force of Mussolini and Hitler. I well remember the anxiety that everybody was in. OF course then the drafting of our boys, calling them into the armed forces, and then putting them on the way across the

water over to those counties. It was some horrible nightmare. But we knew it was the only thing to do, and we did it. Of course, fortunately none of my relatives or loved ones were called over to that section. There were retained here until, of course, the war was over. It's hard to remember all now, of course, those details because there's been so many of them and having the World War II follow by. Of course, I was more interested in World War II because I had three sons of my own in there and three sons-in-law. So that my interests are not for World War I as it was for World War II. But I do remember the feeling that we had here. I was living at the time up in the Teton Basin during summer, trying to run a farm, and the terrible feeling which existed among everybody. Our hopes were not for a quick consumption of all things there cause we knew that over there in Europe, Hitler was so well-prepared and he had the people so convinced of his ability to produce. But the things that were causing us more grief than anything else were the terrible reports of the inhuman acts that were committed upon the Jewish people in that territory. I don't know that we will ever forget the terrible feeling which came over us when we learned of what was being done. Not alone our boys being sacrificed, but how innocent people were being burned to death, starved to death, and every other way of getting rid of them, until it seemed as though that all hell had been turned loose. Now as to the exact battles that were won, of course, you'll have to go to the history of those; because in my 90th year, I have forgotten a lot of those things. I can't remember, but I do remember the activities we did have in this country. The war bonds that were sold, the training that was given to our boys, the sacrifices that were in our homes to make, to work, and to produce, and to inspire those who were called into that very terrific condition they had to face over there. I remember that flu epidemic. Very, very serious one. As I say, I was up in Teton Basin also at the time of the flu. But it was devastating. The reason why, as I observed it, those who came down with the flu mainly seemed to be strong people. And as it had been in the past, you know, we thought by just fighting possibly a little bit, we might overcome the disease; but in this case of this flu those strong men who fought it were soon consumed by it. It was those who were the strongest who died. Oh yes, I remember talking with the doctor in St. Anthony. He told me he had been for two weeks, he hadn't had his clothing off. It was so badly ripped. The flu was breaking up homes - causing so many deaths. And the able-bodied men were the ones who were being carried to their graves. It was a terrible thing. Terrible thing to endure. As I said, we stayed out in the country. We lived simply. We avoided any crowds. We didn't have church; that is, we didn't have any congregations assembling together. We just tried to stay apart as much as we could. But of course, in the towns, people did associate together here, and it was devastating. Very devastating.

CS: Did you increase your crops?

ML: Yes, we did. We work very hard and produced all we could do, and we got a fair price for them. But as I say, the devastation was so terrible. The people were so broken hearted because of the terrible deaths that were being endured, and the loved ones being sacrificed. That was a most sad condition, we had to endure.

CS: What were your feelings at the end of the war?

ML: My feelings at the end of the war was ones of great rejoicing. Oh I remember parading. When the soldiers came back, we had them marching up and down the street, and we were up there on the sides, and we were hailing and hailing those wonderful boys who had come back alive. It was a time of great rejoicing- so much different than what was at the close of the second World War and later wars. That first one we were so happy to see them back again.

CS: Thank you very much. This tape will placed in the library at Ricks College for the use of future researches.