

Interviewee: Bud Williams(BW) and Unidentified Woman (UW)

Interviewer: Unidentified (IV)

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Grove Park, Georgia

Transcript by Dylan Turner

BW: Yeah I,

IV: Don't say anything until I sprinkle a little and yeah, who was the head man down here at Fifer in charge of the operaton.

BW: Well, ... I worked under the owner of it WB Fifer. Until he hired a manager. "Not understandable", then I worked under him until the job was closed. He was alright, WB Fifer was alright. But I like the WB Fifer the best.

IV: Somebody told me they used to use prisoners for chipping trees you ever know anything about that?

BW: Yeah, I used them right there at Fifer when I moved there. Prison was left at the 16th of January 19...16.

IV: They leased them out from Rayford I guess, didn't they or from wherever...

BW: Well at least from the government when the time was out they moved them from there. On the 16th of January in 1916 and listed them to another man up there next to McLennan.

IV: I wonder if many of them tried to get away, I guess they, they didn't try to get away too much.

BW: Well they, didn't many of them do that here. The old man fight for a mighty good time. That's the reason I like the old man alright. I worked under him 16-21, (years old) and he died he hired this general manager and put him over it. He had his rules different from what Fifer companies had. I'll tell you one thing I didn't like about him, if you were living on the quarters any old people come there to see you riding in a car he wouldn't let you "not understandable," the car in the quarters and make you park it on the road out yander. You walk over there and see him, I didn't like that.

IV: So what are the quarters, right close to where Owen, Illinois office is now or back off...

BW: Right side the highway.

IV: Right side of the highway.

BW: Outside both of them you've been through there.

IV: Yeah.

BW: Dual grade and this highway started right in that fork over there. It comes like "not understandable," on this side. Now if you had a daughter or son living over in the quarters and drove your car up there wanting to go over there to see them, why you had to park your car over here out there on that side then you walked through the quarter to see them if you wanted to see them. I didn't

appreciate that, I didn't thought that was right. But he didn't beat 'em up, he didn't kick 'em around, and I spoke some hard words but its very rare.

IV: They used to say in the old days if you owned... owed a lot of money to the commissary you couldn't leave so somebody had to pay off your debt then therefore you could leave.

BW: Well that was essentially everywhere. You want to talk about that firm back up in Georgia, North Florida. If you owed an amount on an account and left they'd catch ya and whip you. I'm talking about 10 times.

IV: Yeah I've heard about that

BW: Huh?

IV: I've heard about that, but I don't know.

BW: I named them places, but they never did catch nobody over here. I don't believe they did, I never did hear that. Many one of them left, all kinds of ways riding, walking, but he didn't catch them and whip 'em but if you owed that man it's up to your place to go get another man to pay your account and move that was the law. That was the law, but if you run away and get out of his sight going about your business but the debt was paid. Lots of 'em done that there.

IV: How many families did they have there at Fifa when they were, how many cabinets?

BW: Well, I'll tell you like this you could hold 65 that many houses. How come there's that many houses, cause there used to be a mill site there and the mill left all the headquarters "Not understandable." But he was "not understandable," on the job on 72 working men. He had Canfield, Douglas, Fifer. When he saw it he shot it up, closed the jobs up and it was just...

IV: Where did most of them go too?

BW: Hmmm?

IV: I said where did most of the labor go to when they closed it down?

BW: Well, there's some of them right cheer now. Yeah, they just found a job where they could. Some of them here, some of them died here. Yeah she was here, she come up under me.

IV: You've seen lots of changes haven't you?

BW: Lots of changes since that time.

UW: "Not Understandable," He'd come in in the afternoon "Not Understandable," get ready and clean up a little bit "Not understandable," Thomas behind the counter waitin on you. "Not Understandable," He would be coming in and out going in and out with those packages and different things. He'd be right behind that counter helping us.

IV: Did you get a good selection of groceries in the commerce area?

UW: Oh yes!

BW: Yeah, he kept planting groceries.

UW: He would clean up and go right on to the commissary and help out behind the counter. Different trucks be coming in. The mens be getting off the trucks, before they go home they stop in the commissary and pick them up a package and uncle Bud would be right there to help wait on them till the commissary close up. That's what he'd do in the afternoon after he be done got through riding woods.

IV: Did they have a pretty good selection of groceries?

UW: Oh yes sir, they sure did, they sure had plenty of groceries in there. That's right. Yes sir, sure did he used to do that everyday.

IV: What would you be doing when he would come in?

UW: Be 'round planes and what. It's not that you know what time we, we loved to fish. Sometimes we'd be on fish creek and things like that but in the afternoon if mama wanted something from the store she'd send me up there. I'd mostly look for Uncle Bud or Mr. Richard Barnes because see sometimes they'd have that showcase of candy back there, a long showcase of candy. Every now and then they'd give me one of those suckers and things like that and I'd be looking for them to give me one of them. While they went down which candy they would give us, we got balls, those little suckers you put in your mouth and on the sticks you said and we'd be satisfied. Mhm...

IV: When you were sick, what would your mother do for you?

UW: Well I tell you what, my mama now don't let you say don't let me say I had a fever or a bad cold. Okay, get in the bed, go lay down. If she ain't got it she goin up to the store. Get one of them bottles of "Not Understandable," drop a little turpentine in it but only so many drops in a dose. Stir that thing up be so nasty, couldn't hardly swallow it if you spit that out you just might as well try to keep it in you because she gonna give you some more. When you drink that go on and lay down "Not Understandable," used to have this uh... tala that they would get from cows, and they'd get that tala and that... other stuff there just mix it however it makes do. And sometimes they have something to cook it to make it warm in, and plaster your chest, plaster your head, and everything. And then at night you'd have to get under that cover don't care how hot it was you'd have to stay under that cover until you sweat. The next morning when you get up you'll be feelin alright if you had a fever. And then sometime they go out in the woods and get something they called the black snake root. And another thing the gold thing, they called the golden rod you ever heard of that?

IV: What'd you use it for?

UW: For tea! To drink. And another kind of tea they used to have... What that tea (talking to herself,) Life everlasting tea. Called rabbit tobacco, it grows like that when it's dry turned white. They go out in them woods and gather that by the big bones. Tied it up right when they got home. Tied up they got a barn where they stick it up there in their barn. Now you get sick if you want, if you want to drink some of this black tea that nasty tea don't tell 'em that you sick. Drink that, but all that stuff is good though, sure was.

IV: What'd you use for bee stings?

UW: Bee stings? Lemme see. Wait. Wait. Wait. Getting to that. If you ever bee sting you anywhere if anybody 'round you chewin tobacco get a chew of that and chew it up right quick and just rub it down

and plast it on ya and that's good, that was good for bee stings at that time but I don't think its too good now. They've got so many different things.

IV: What about if you had a cut?

UW: "Not Understandable," If you wanted to stop the bleeding, mama and them would go to work get these here spider webs just pull the spider web down and paste it on that cut anywhere just paste it on there and if it comes through there must be aint got enough on it, get some more and slap it on there and hold it on there and wont be long for the bleeding to stop. That's right. Yes sir.

IV: When people would, when women would have their babies what would they do? Would they need somebody to help them?

UW: Oh yeah! Yeah! They had a, they had midwives to call them in them days, and when a lady get out sick they'd send for the midwife to come see about it.

IV: Is that usually a friend or relative?

UW: Uh, no that was a lady who mostly tend to the woman, but had the baby and they baby for so many days.

IV: Was she paid?

UW: Yes, sometimes. Sometimes people had about two or three dollars to give 'em, but most of the time people used to get things I want you to give them out of the commissary and different things and be satisfied with that. That's the way it used to go.

IV: Did you ever have a doctor come around the camp at all?

UW: Oh yeah, we had a family doctor. Dr. Floyd he used to live here to, Hawthorn but very seldom you mess with Dr. Floyd unless there's some kind of serious case because them old folks love them home remedies and they was good at that time too. If you take bad or sick you know you go up there to the commissary and tell the man you needed a doctor it wont be long before the doctor be walking in your house. That's the way that went. Dr. Floyd, that was our family doctor.

IV: What else did you use turpentine for as far as medicine goes?

UW: I'll tell you what, you could take a teaspoon of sugar, and they drop that turpentine on that sugar and then get a match and put that on, and burn that sugar. Set that turpentine of fire and burn it until that sugar kind of started turning brown like syrup in certain places and then they'll give you that for you to suck for that cold if you got a head cold, breast cold up here sometimes, a cough. Worms, for worms that's right for worms to. That's how they used to do that now. For them worms, they'd find out you got worms, children got worms they used to take a streak of turpentine and make some kind of ring around your stomach and keep bringing it in like that then the next time they'd come up here with some kind of way and come all the way down to mark it and give them such a length of time wont be long for them worms get out. That's right.

IV: It was just plain turpentine?

UW: Plain turpentine. That's right. But they used to do some kind of way to mark around your navel and keep bring it in, then mark it this way and mark it across or something, but anyway to be marking it

down. What it do is be marking it down for them worms to come down instead of going up, because sometimes you know what I have seen one come out children's mouth. I really have seen that. Yes sir. If they got worms bad they have to mark in some kind of way that turpentine for them to go down. That the way it go. They get the worms out of them alright some of the biggest kind. Yes sir.

IV: Did you ever have any celebrations or the company ever give you any fish fries or anything like that?

UW: Oh boy.

IV: Christmas or whenever, Fourth of July?

BW: Like I said, he was good man in some ways and not so good in others.

UW: Yes sir! Yes sir, they used to give us, when Mr. W.B. Fifer was living we didn't have boy, sure didn't.

IV: Would they give you Christmas time? What would they do?

UW: Just like one of these big holidays, like we used at that time they used to didn't take the "Not Understandable," they used to call that the 20th of May that was the big day. That was near bout going on about half of the year and they gave a big celebration or something like that. He'd sure give them picnics for ya. You'd have some of those kind of stuff. But one thing you better not let him see you with, don't care what kind of picnic he gives, better not let you, better not let him see you with a whiskey bottle out during that picnic.

IV: He didn't like that.

UW: Better not let him see you with no whiskey bottle out there to the picnic. No sir!

IV: Did you all have any kind of music at all?

UW: Oh yeah!

IV: What kind?

UW: Them old, big old Victrola we had one. They call them Victrola.

IV: Victrola?

UW: And had a big horn on it. Bud you remember when I had that big old Victrola and had that horn on it and had all kind of, and we used to to get out in our yard papa used to learn us how to cakewalk, an old fashioned record about chicken and the straw and all like that. We'd used to get out there and dance and he'd learn us how to cakewalk. Just going around and

BW: I remember all that.

UW: Yeah! And me and miss Biash and my dad went to cake one time cakewalk right there at my house. Sure did, we used to have good times with that great big ole Victrola and some people had something down there but we had the big old horned out and you could hear it all over the place just about. Yard are full of children dancing their little dance what we do.

IV: How big a family did you come from? How many brothers and sisters did you grow up with?

UW: Oh, I was just three children in my family. Two boys and one girl and I was the baby. But I had plenty of other kin folks around us on my mama's side boy it was crowded there.

BW: "Not Understandable"

IV: Yeah, we'll switch it back to...

UW: Yeah we usually have some pretty good times during that time when uncle Bud...

IV: What was some of the songs you would listen to?

UW: Chicken in the Straw and when it got a little bit later down the line Papa bought us some records. I don't know where they are, I got them on "Not Understandable," He got the Saint Louis Blues and he got uh... something else he got, but uh he got some things with music which we could dance by it when he got the St. Louis Blues. I think everybody liked that because mostly that would be what we played and it'd be turned up all over the quarters everybody listening. That was the latest record we had. But we used to dance by them others though, call ourselves dancing because the Cakewalk and those Charleston and the two, the two step and uh the firewood. Get on your heel and kick up your heel following and going on but me and my oldest brother, my brother Willie now he could buck dance and put us out there on the floor now it wasn't no, we didn't have to buck dance, we didn't buck dance by those things. They used to do this... and you go by that and get out on that floor and you could hear foots going by the music. Sure would! Buck Dancing! Yes sir. We usually had some good ole times though, every day wasn't good but some days were better than others.

BW: Every day wasn't good, but some days you had a good day.

UW: Yep, alright!