

ORAL HISTORY T-0233
INTERVIEWEE: Mr. TEDFORD P. LEWIS
INTERVIEWER: JEANNE MONGOLD
CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR PROJECT
JANUARY 16, 1973

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MONGOLD: Today is January 16, 1973, and this is Jeanne Mongold. As part of the Oral History Program of the University of Missouri-St. Louis, I have with me today Mr. Tedford P. Lewis. I am interviewing Mr. Lewis with the intention of getting a narrative of his experiences as a Conscientious Objector in World War II in the years 1941-1946-47. Where were you born, Mr. Lewis?

LEWIS: Well, I was born at 420 West Swon, Webster Groves, and except when I was out of the city working or during CPS, lived in Webster the rest of my life. I was born 1, 1919...had the rather usual childhood background for kids of those days...a nice backyard to play in, lots of good playmates. ..

MONGOLD: Swon is south of Lockwood, isn't it?

LEWIS: Swon is between Lockwood and Rock Hill. I have never been more than 150 feet from Swon Avenue. (laughter) In residence.

MONGOLD: What did your father do? salvage a company and was unsuccessful in his efforts. The company, well, it was a bondholders' company, and he thought he had a way that he could make it effective, but he couldn't get enough people to go along with him, and, consequently, the company did go ahead and fail.

MONGOLD: Well, I'll be darned. Did that affect things during the depression as far as your life and the big backyard on Swon?

LEWIS: Well, we managed to stay in the big backyard on Swon. The money was not flowing in with any great rapidity, and Dad had a good many different experiences during those days. I guess, from that point forth, he was never employed...but always worked as an independent developer to try to develop this or develop that, or work out some company that was in difficulty, or take on the promotion of a new product. So, it...I guess, I was influenced in my background a good deal by seeing him in his various business operations...

MONGOLD: Was he home a lot?

LEWIS: He worked from his house from that time, for the most part. And he was in such adventures as the Murphy Doorbed Company and trying to help a group of landlords in Texas who had oil land and had not received their oil rights or royalties from the oil companies. He was interested in trying to salvage the land around Alton from the Alton Dam

Project.

MONGOLD: Where did you go to school? In the public schools here in Webster?

LEWIS: I went to the Webster Groves Schools all the way through... Bristol School Elementary and Webster Groves High School. And, I guess, the first influences I felt toward the Peace Movement came from my stepmother. My own mother passed away when I was eight, and my father married my mother's sister.

MONGOLD: Oh...well, I'll be;

LEWIS: And my stepmother had been overseas in World War I as a YMCA worker... And her statement, I remember well, was that she had gone over to help make the world safe for democracy, and now that she was back, she had to do what she could to keep it safe for democracy, and she was interested in many organizations...the old League of Nations Association, the Fellowship of Reconciliation...was well aware of the first breaths of the Quaker Meeting here in St. Louis. This sort of thing.

MONGOLD: What religion were you raised in...or were your parents?

LEWIS: Well, as I understand it, I was baptized a Presbyterian, but my parents went across the street very shortly after my baptism, and the only church I remember in my youth was the Congregational Church.

MONGOLD: The Congregational Church...was that in Webster Groves?

LEWIS: In Webster Groves.

MONGOLD: Where was that located?

LEWIS: That is located at Elm and Lockwood. Dwight Bradley was the minister all through my childhood. I used to play with his son. Bill, a great deal, and after Dwight Bradley left, George Gibson took over. George Gibson was a Pacifist at that time, as was Dwight Bradley. Following George Gibson then came Reverend Inglis. Reverend Inglis was likewise a Pacifist.

MONGOLD: Why do you think they had Pacifists...three in a row at this church? Is there something about this Congregational doctrine that would have inclined them to that, or...

LEWIS: Well, I suppose it is basically the liberal doctrine of the Congregational Church that enables them to have people who have opinions that might be quite contrary to the normal opinion held in the meeting or the group. Dwight Bradley did not maintain his Pacifism when World War II came along. I remember a month or two after World War II started, having a conversation with him, and his opinion had changed or altered. He said, "While we are at peace, we ought to work for peace, but under these circumstances, I see no alternative but to go to war." Whether this was a changeover in his feelings, or whether it was a development or growth of his feelings, I don't know, because I didn't talk...while he was in St. Louis...these things over with him. I was too young to be interested or involved. But I did remember that historically he had been considered a Pacifist. George Gibson was then and

still is a Pacifist, but is thoughtful and knows full well his position and why he takes it.

MONGOLD: How about your parents...how did they feel? Or were they inclined toward Pacifism, too?

LEWIS: During the War, when the war commenced, my mother still maintained her Pacifism. My father was a thinking man, but I guess he didn't do too much thinking about what was right or wrong in this particular situation. He had not been in World War I. He missed the draft there by having children, I guess. I recall his making a statement that he had three sons and he would support his three sons in whatever position they took.

MONGOLD: There were three of you. How are you in the family...oldest. youngest?

LEWIS: I am the youngest.

MONGOLD: You're the youngest...so, you had two older brothers. Any sisters?

LEWIS: No sisters.

MONGOLD: No sisters.

LEWIS: But my father did support all three of us. My oldest brother was a Conscientious Objector, my second brother was drafted, and then I was a Conscientious Objector. During...well, let's see...I can go back to the time when I was fourteen. I remember walking home from a Scout meeting with three other fellows, and we stood on the corner of Gore and Swon Avenues for, I suppose, two hours talking. And we talked, fundamentally, about the Oxford Movement, which was strong in England at that time. And the four of us, standing on the corner by ourselves, took the Oxford Pledge.

MONGOLD: How had you heard about it? Through the church?

LEWIS: Oh, goodness' sakes... through my mother, through the church, through the school...I don't know...just one of those things which was in my environment that I couldn't tell really...

MONGOLD: Your mother was active, say, in FOR? At that time?

LEWIS: She was active in FOR at that time, yes. Well, the whole family was. My father was active in it...the FOR, also. I don't know what position my father would have taken at that time, and I doubt that he would have known. I think if it had faced him, pin-point for a decision, he would very possibly have been a Conscientious Objector, though he would not have been during the World War I time, I'm sure. His thinking pattern had not been developed at that time.

MONGOLD: What ethnic background..."Lewis" is an English-sounding name.

LEWIS: Basically Welsh. There's a little German, a little French... and who knows what else?...a mixed-up European background. This had nothing to do with it. No.

MONGOLD: It had nothing to do with it. Was this...now you were fourteen. ..what year

would that have been?

LEWIS: That was 1933.

MONGOLD: 1933. So, that would have been about the time of the rise of Hitler. And that was when the putsch occurred. So, Hitler's movement, and all of this, would have been coming up in Germany, and we would have been having problems with the Japanese, too, the Japanese in China.

LEWIS: Right. Manchuria was in question about that time.

MONGOLD: What was the reaction of the other boys? Or, you all three took this Oxford Pledge?

LEWIS: The other three boy's... one had a family that was in rather tight financial circumstances. His father passed away just prior to the war. He had to help support his mother. He went in as a paratrooper, primarily because it paid more than anything else, and he was able to send home a bigger paycheck. In this way, he helped his family. Financially, I guess he just couldn't afford to be a Conscientious Objector because he had more responsibility than just for himself.

MONGOLD: But when you were fourteen, you all had this sort of idealistic and similar feelings. What about then when you went on through high school and the war became more imminent and, well, I guess...you graduated in 1938?

LEWIS: 1936.

MONGOLD: 1936...

LEWIS: I had a very interesting history teacher whose name was J. C. Aldrich. Shortly after leaving Webster High, he went to Columbia University as a history professor. I recall about 1940-41, maybe, Ted Lentz and I were sitting together, and we got to talking about J. C. Aldrich, and Ted said, "Let's write Aldrich and find out what's happened to his Pacifism." So, Ted did, in fact, write him a letter and very quickly a letter came from Aldrich in reply. And Aldrich said, in effect, that he could not understand what had happened in his teaching of history... that he was not a Pacifist, had never been a Pacifist, had never intended to develop Pacifists in his history classes, but that out of all of the history classes he taught came an unusual number of Pacifists. And, I would attribute this to the fact that J. C. Aldrich was never concerned with names and dates and places, but rather with causes and effects. What is the cause of this situation? What is the result of this situation? Or this action, that was taken by so-and-so? I guess that this cause and effect approach to history, rather than pinpointing facts which are rapidly forgotten, probably stimulated people to do a little more thinking than they had otherwise, and I guess got some people thinking just why we do have wars. So, J. C. Aldrich was a very powerful, but unwitting, influence for a good many people in Webster Groves. Well, when I was eleven years old, my sixteen year old brother started a children's camp in Webster Groves. The first summer, I went as a camper, and the next summer, I went as a junior counselor, and when I became sixteen, he moved to out-of-town camps, and I took over the children's camp. And, then, that for five additional years, I guess, so I was eleven years in children's camp work. And, I would suppose, that this had some influence on

my thinking pattern. I went to Grinnell College for one year. I went to Westminster College for one year. Then, because of tying up the camp that I had been operating with Ivanhoe Lodge and becoming its program director, I moved to St. Louis for schooling in order to run a winter camp program at Ivanhoe Lodge. Some very interesting situations in that developed. As the war came closer and actually began...one woman who had been an ardent Pacifist was one of the half-dozen outstanding peace workers in the St. Louis community...

MONGOLD: What was her name?

LEWIS: I don't recall...without thinking...and, perhaps, it would be just as well not to say it anyway. She might prefer that it not be mentioned. But, I recall she had a telephone conversation with me when I was setting up one of her boys for summer camp, and she asked me whether I would be at the camp that summer, and I said that I didn't know...that I was subject to the draft, and I would be there as long as I was not drafted. I didn't feel it was necessary to say how I would be drafted or anything else. The question had been whether or not I would be at camp, and I felt this was the answer to her question. A few days later, she called me up extremely irate, feeling I had given her part information. And she said, "You didn't tell me you were going to be a Conscientious Objector." I said that I hadn't thought it was necessary, and I also said that I felt it wouldn't have bothered her in any case. She said, "Well, it certainly does. Now that we are at war, there's just one position I can take." And we talked about it for a half-hour, or forty-five minutes, - her position and my position, and when we finally got through, we each held our same positions, but we each had a great deal more respect for one another than we had at the beginning of the conversation, and the result of our conversation was not only that we gained more respect for each other, she signed up a second child to go to camp. (laughter)

MONGOLD: Oh; That's good.' You were persuasive, then: Let's see. Would that have been in 1940 when the draft act was passed, but we weren't in active war yet?

LEWIS: This was in the summer of 1941...not quite "The Summer of '42", as the movie would have us.' There was one other interesting situation. As the program director of the camp, I had a certain amount of authority and position to do various things, and there was one person, in particular, that was somewhat jealous of this authority that I had. She was working in a private school, and had come to the camp on the basis that she would be able to supply a good many campers. And, as a matter of fact, she had supplied none. And the fact that I had a following and was able to bring in a good many campers, this was something of which she was quite jealous. She knew I was a Conscientious Objector, and she carried it back to the principals of her private school. What was said in this conversation, I have no idea of, but she came back to camp and reported to the camp owner that the principal of the school was extremely unhappy and that I should not be permitted to drive a bus for the school, nor should I be permitted to run the recreation program for the school in the wintertime, and that it was imperative, if we were not to endanger our relationships with the school, that I should leave the camp immediately.

MONGOLD: What happened?

LEWIS: I was called in by the camp director and owner, and we sat down and had quite a discussion, and he was about to let me go. I said, "Well, you're the owner of the camp and

there's no choice. I will go, but I'm not willing to go just on the basis of this conversation. I think we need to find out just what was really said and what was really felt...not go on the basis of one-way communication." So, I went down and talked to the owner of the school, and this happened to be Mary Rossman of the Rossman School. And I told her what had transpired at camp and that, in fact, my position at the camp and school was threatened by the report of what she had said. Miss Rossman said this was not the case. "I was interested to find out that you were a Conscientious Objector; I don't necessarily agree with you. I don't necessarily disagree with you, but we are delighted to have a person who knows his mind to be at the school." And, rather than endanger my situation, the whole situation, as brought up by this one person..."troublemaker"...really solidified my position both at the camp and at the school. I told this story primarily to show that, even at that time when war fevers were running high, that so long as a person appeared sincere in his belief, most thoughtful people gave support, in my opinion. These were not people who would necessarily agree at all. War was declared, and the first news of it came when I was in the Quadrangle Shop of Washington University. I was talking to a group of people, and every single one of us, when we heard the radio announcement, fell into absolute silence. We were awestruck...we, I guess, were all naive enough to say, "It can't happen to our generation." We had seen the handwriting on the wall, but perhaps something like death...you know that it is imminent, but you refuse to recognize that it's going to come. We went our various ways with our various thoughts, and my reaction was to go home. I went up to my room and I spent the next week in my room, coming down for dinner, or meals, and, as a matter of fact, I don't even remember going to classes at Washington U. I had to sit and think. What do I really think? Okay, I knew what I did think, but what do I think now that war is actually at hand? And after a week, it all dawned on me very, very simply, that if a person is a Pacifist at one time, then the circumstances in his life cannot and should not alter this basic feeling and, consequently, I felt that if I was right previously, then I would be right to carry on as a Pacifist and to take the position of Conscientious Objector., So, the draft came along. Am I missing anything here?

MONGOLD: Well, had your brother already received a notice or been inducted or gotten his Conscientious Objector status before that, since he was older?

LEWIS: No, none of us was affected prior to the war coming along. And, as a matter of fact, let's see, my oldest brother was the first to be drafted. And he went through with his Conscientious Objector position with no problem whatsoever.

MONGOLD: Now, was this draft board in Webster Groves?

LEWIS: This was the draft board that was on Gore Avenue in Webster Groves, but not the present draft board. It was subsequently moved out onto Gravois Avenue.

MONGOLD: Did you know any of these people? Were they really friends and neighbors, as the old code always says about draft boards?

LEWIS: Well, I didn't know any of them at the time that the draft case came up. In spite of the fact that my brother had gone through with no problem whatsoever, and was immediately assigned his 1-0 position, when I went before the draft board with what I felt was just as sound a case as he had...same background, same religious and family background...no reason

why one should get it and not the other as far as I could tell...the draft board rejected it.

MONGOLD: Had you been required to fill in any forms regarding C.O. status when you first registered for the draft, or was this something that you did at a later time?

LEWIS: As I recall, there was a place on the initial registration form which asked for one's position, and there was no question in my mind at that time. I immediately filled out that I would be filing as a Conscientious Objector. And whether I filled out the form 100 which was for Conscientious Objectors at that time or subsequently, I don't recall.

MONGOLD: There were a number of questions at that time. I've got some copies of those forms, you know, where they have to explain all the influences in their religious background and then, the type of Conscientious Objection. Now which type...the complete opposition to any participation in the war at all, or did you feel...in other words, you wouldn't even accept non-combatance, you would only participate in something that had no connection with war. Is that right?

LEWIS: Right, right. My feeling then, and my feeling today, is that if a person is a Conscientious Objector, there is one thing to do. And that is not to support the war...or, a war. If I say, "I'll go into the medical corps, or if I go into the quartermaster corps...something of this sort", then, in fact, personally, though I can understand the position of others, I am relieving someone else to go into the front lines, this strikes me as hypocrisy. I am only saving my own skin to let someone else do the dirty work. The medical corps would have, perhaps, some difference, in my opinion. The out-and-out desire to help a person who was in desperate need of help. But, certainly, working in the quartermaster corps doing office jobs to relieve someone else, I could not see for myself. As a matter of fact, just before...or, some months before...I was drafted, I made application for the American Field Service to serve in Africa in the ambulance corps. And my acceptance for that came one day after my draft notice: Otherwise, my life history might have been considerably altered.

MONGOLD: Much different, yes.

LEWIS: But, in having mailed out the draft notice, there was nothing that the draft board could or would do at that time.

MONGOLD: These people that refused to give you the 1-0. Did they call you in? In other words, was there a hearing where you confronted them, and they expressed their opinions?

LEWIS: Well, let's see. The procedure then was somewhat different than it is today. But, as I recall, they gave me a 1-A. I wrote an appeal. and got a number of letters from friends and acquaintances and professional people that knew me in one capacity or another to support my letter of appeal. As I recall, it then went to the...I guess there was one more hearing in the draft board at that point of which I have no remembrance...if I should have...but, I have a feeling, that this was a closed door meeting, and once more it was rejected. (Do you want to move over and get out of the sun?)

MONGOLD: No, that's okay. I'll just scoot back.)

LEWIS: Oh...

MONGOLD: You don't remember having any feelings that these people were antagonistic to you, or remember their expressing anything...?

LEWIS: None whatsoever. The clerk of the draft board was a very friendly person and gave an uncommon amount of time to helping me with my decision. I can remember sitting at his desk while he would flip pages for a half-hour at a time looking for rules and regulations that would help support the position that I had. I thought that I got nothing but total support from the clerk at the draft board. It was quite different from what our local draft board in Webster Groves has been in the recent past. The case then went before the Federal Hearing Officer and, if my recollection serves me correctly, this hearing before the Federal Hearing Officer who, in fact, was a District Judge, was the counterpart of a hearing which a person would have today before the draft board itself.

MONGOLD: You don't remember who the Judge was, do you?

LEWIS: I do not. I might be able to find records of it. After filing this appeal, I was subjected to FBI investigation, and I know that the FBI were investigating me for over a period of seven weeks, because people would come to me and report that the FBI had been around to see them, and from the first to the last of those reports, it was seven weeks. I hope, for the sake of our government, that they didn't have two men trailing me for a period of seven weeks because this would be an expensive operation for the government, (laughter)

MONGOLD: You were in school?

LEWIS: Yes, I was in school and doing camp work at this time. There were several amusing incidents with the FBI. One, I recall, was being at camp, and as program director, it was my responsibility to know all the people who came and went, tradesmen, etc., and I saw a car drive up in the parking lot, a black car, and two men in business suits got out, sharp looking business suits, dark tie, white shirt, dark hats, and I immediately sensed they were FBI men. (laughter) So, I went up as I would have to anybody and asked if I could be of help. They said they were looking for Mr. Coombes and I said, "Well, he's right across the street. Let me take you over." So, I took them over and introduced them to Mr. Coombes and said, "Here are two gentlemen who would like to see you. If you'll excuse me now, I think they want to talk to you about me. They are from the FBI and want to talk to you privately about me, and I'll leave." And when I said they were from the FBI, their jaws really dropped, (laughter) But, I guess, what I'm really saying is that the FBI were not all that secret...in those days.

MONGOLD: No, not in those days: Or, maybe, they didn't know how to be:

LEWIS: Then came the hearing before the Federal Hearing Officer. I felt that the Hearing was very straight forward. Questions that were asked me were direct, not antagonistic, penetrating, but not done in such a way as to throw me off-guard.

MONGOLD: Then, they didn't ask you that old thing about how if your sister were being attacked by somebody, would you fight back?

LEWIS: No, no, this sort of question was left out. Personal and governmental situations were not tangled up, as so frequently people do attempt to do. Of course, the old answer to that is,

"What if someone were attacking your grandmother?" You simply would say, "I'd lay two-to-one odds on grandma:" (laughter) But, again, the sort of questions that were asked... I remember a few of them. A fellow said, "I take it that you do not believe in handling guns?" And I said, "No. To the contrary, I believe that for a person to know how to handle a gun is good sport and good practice and, as a matter of fact, I am a gun instructor for the National Rifle Association." I would not be today. I think the National Rifle Association has changed its color. Or, at least, I didn't know what color it was at that time. "Well, now," he said, "how can you justify that?" And he gave me an opportunity to justify my position. I was a little amused because the FBI had gone to the Boy Scout Headquarters, and one of the specific things they had found out was that I did not have a merit badge in riflery. (laughter) But this sort of question, I felt, was a very fair question. However, the judge filed against me and reported negatively to the draft board.

MONGOLD: In your C.O. application, were you basing it on religious grounds? Weren't you?

LEWIS: Yes.

MONGOLD: And you had been a member of the Congregational Church?

LEWIS: For a good many years...since I was eight years old, I guess.

MONGOLD: I wonder...would the difficulty be that they couldn't see this as a doctrine or tenant of Congregationalism?

LEWIS: Well, I think that this question might be answered by what happened along about that time, and I guess it was after the Federal Hearing and after I had been rejected by the Federal Hearing Officer. I went to the draft board and talked to the clerk and I said, "What's the matter with my case? I just can't see any flaws in it. I've got letters from people of unquestioned situation in the community, the FBI report is certainly not derogatory in any way...on the basis of the FBI report, I would think that I would be given a C.O. status." "Well," he said, "perhaps there is one thing..." And I said, "Would you be good enough to tell me?" He said, "Yes. The draft board has a religious advisor. (And whether this was cricket in those days or not, I don't know. I have the feeling that this was a person called upon by the draft board to say, "Look at these papers and tell us how you feel." Whether he was actually a member of the draft board or had any official position with them, I could not say.) And I said, "Well, what did the religious advisor say?" He said, "The religious advisor said, "This man does not qualify." I said, "Did he put in any statement as to why?" He said, "No. And the draft board and others are going heavily upon his statement." So, I said, "Would you be good enough to give me his name so I can go and visit him and find out what his thinking is." He said, "Yes, you certainly have a right to go to talk to him. However, let me ask you to wait until Monday." (This was Saturday afternoon, and I had gotten my... no, Saturday morning, and I had gotten my notice of rejection in Friday's mail and I had three days in which to make my appeal...! had Saturday, Sunday, and Monday...! had to have my appeal in by then.) And I pointed out that come Monday (after I had had a chance to talk to him), I would have no more time to come up with appeal procedures. And, so, he finally said, "Well, all right. But try not to take up too much of his time. Remember that Saturday is the day that many ministers prepare their Sunday morning sermons." (laughter) So, I went over to his

house and waited for him. He finally drove in the driveway, from the grocery store, and we sat down and had quite a little chat. He was not unfriendly. He was not sympathetic at all. He was an E & R (Evangelical and Reformed) minister, and his basic statement was this, "You have never filed a statement through your church with the Department of Justice that you have the position of Conscientious Objector." And I said, "What is there in the law that would require this?" He said, "Well, I guess there is nothing in the law, but your brother did. If your brother did, why didn't you?" And I said, "Well, you know at the time that was done was during the time of the Oxford Movement and I was fourteen years old. My brother was nineteen, and I guess my brother was just a lot more realistic than I was. At the age of fourteen, I couldn't be bothered with thinking that deeply that far ahead." And I said, "That's exactly the reason I didn't file. Today, if the opportunity were there, I would do it. But after I was fifteen, the opportunity passed. This was just a short lived program." He said, "Well, even so, this is my position." So, I went back to see Ervin Inglis at that point, and Ervin Inglis called together. At that point, seventeen prominent people in the community.

MONGOLD: Webster Groves community? Or, were they from the St. Louis area?

LEWIS: The St. Louis area, really. I would guess that out of this group of seventeen there probably were not more than two who agreed with the position that I held. The rest of them were community leaders, men whom Reverend Inglis knew, and men, incidentally, that I knew from work, camp, or school or something. The seventeen of them sat down and said, "All right. I'll go see so-and-so, and I'll go see so-and-so"...and each one took as his responsibility a personal visit somewhere along the line, so that the people who were saying "No" to me would have a respectable, personal opinion about this queer guy, Ted Lewis. It didn't do much good: (laughter)

MONGOLD: After all that!

LEWIS: So, I went with my father on a drive to Jefferson City, and we walked into the office of the State Director of Selective Service. He was quite interested in meeting me, knew me by name. He said, "You do me one favor." And I said, "What's that?" He said, "Write me a letter asking me to appeal your case for Presidential Appeal." And I said, "Certainly." He said, "I would appreciate it, because I would like to have that in my records. And would you date it such-and-such?" I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, you have the thickest file in the State of Missouri, and the person with the thickest file in the State of Missouri is going to get what he is after, so far as I am concerned." (laughter) Well, I've heard of people trying to jam their files with Bibles and telephone books and all sorts of things, but mine was just full of letters, and this apparently influenced the guy. (laughter)

MONGOLD: Were there any other of your friends who were going through the same thing?

LEWIS: I don't recall anyone else from St. Louis who went through Presidential Appeal.

MONGOLD: Did you feel that you were an anomaly, or were there a number of C.O. Appeals, do you think? Or, were you alone?

LEWIS: No, no. Reverend Inglis had two sons who were C.O.'s, my brother was a C.O. Roy Sommerer was a C.O. Russ Wilderman was a C.O., and some other people whose names slip

me now. So, we were not alone, and we had monthly meetings of the Fellowship of Reconciliation which most of us went to with a degree of regularity. And, consequently, there was a source of support.

MONGOLD: Where did the Fellowship meet?

LEWIS: In various churches. Each meeting was held in a different church. I guess, in reality, we were very fortunate to have this under girding.

MONGOLD: Did they give guidance as how to use on how to use legal procedures, and writing out your statements and things like that for your draft boards?

LEWIS: So far as I know, there was no organization locally in those days that gave that kind of help. Nobody had set up a program to give counseling. There was an organization. The National Council of Conscientious Objectors, NCCO.

MONGOLD: Were they active at this time?

LEWIS: They became active about this time, I guess. And a person, if he knew of them, could write to them and get help.

MONGOLD: You never heard of the War Resister's League?

LEWIS: I was really not familiar with the War Resistor's League at that time. I had heard of it, but I was not familiar with it. The WRL. My Presidential Appeal came back favorable. I guess it was at that time, I saw for the first time the actual FBI report. The dates slip me, but I guess it was about a month after that came back that I was finally drafted... on May 15, 1942, I think. I was sent to Coshocton, Ohio, to a Soil Conservation Camp and found a group of fellows such as one just doesn't encounter in ordinary society. They were sincere, dedicated to what they were doing. Life's goals were not "goodtime Charlie" sorts of things that one experiences on the college campus community, at that time. They were people from all walks of life.

MONGOLD: What about the education of all of these people? Occupations or economic background?

LEWIS: Well, they ranged from poverty to extreme wealth in economic background. Cultural background, essentially the same; such as religious background, from ultra-conservative religious philosophies to extremely liberal and, as a matter of fact, there were a few who were somehow or other able to establish their C.O. position on humanitarian grounds, not on religious grounds. At that time, humanitarian grounds had not been generally accepted as a basis. This was a matter of individual draft boards.

MONGOLD: Who ran the Coshocton Camp?

LEWIS: The Coshocton Camp was run by the American Friends Service Committee. The situation was then that as long as we had the finances to pay for our room and board, we were requested or permitted to contribute \$35.00 a month,

MONGOLD: Did you have that money, or did your parents support you?

LEWIS: I paid some and my parents paid some. Basically, this kept on for a couple of years. Out of this \$35.00 a month, we were given \$2.50 spending money. Those who could not pay, did not pay, and they were still given the \$2.50 spending money. Everyone was on an absolutely equal footing.

MONGOLD: You weren't married, you say?

LEWIS: I was not married.

MONGOLD: Were there some with families who suffered hardships that you know of?

LEWIS: I was not aware of any at that particular time in that particular camp. It seems to me that there were two or three... Well, as a matter of fact, I know at least a half-dozen married people, because their wives would come and spend the weekends occasionally. I have a feeling that at the early part of the war, this was not a particular problem of hardship, because wives were still at home or working or had no children. For the most part, this was the situation. Or, in the case where a person was established, for instance, we had farmers whose wives stayed at home and handled the farm, though, perhaps, not as effectively, they would still have the income from the farm. There were many teachers, farmers, factory workers, the first violinist from the New York Philharmonic was in that camp. Many, many students.

MONGOLD: Your brother was sent to Magnolia, and I was wondering how it was that you were sent to Coshocton in Ohio, since there was some link apparently that with Magnolia, Arkansas, being closer to the St. Louis area...and I just wondered...

LEWIS: Who is to know? (laughter) Who is to know whether there was motivation to separate family members, whether there was motivation just... My feeling at the time was that there was no reason why one of us was sent one place and the other sent somewhere else. I did not feel any...well, I wasn't feeling paranoid at the time...(laughter)

MONGOLD: I don't think you have a tendency to feel paranoid: (laughter)

LEWIS: So, I was there two and one-half months and did soil conservation work...reading rain gauge meters, checking run-off in flumes, percolation tests...

MONGOLD: Did you have any feelings that this work wasn't useful or that your talents weren't being used?

LEWIS: At this point, no. Basically, I was in a position where the work I was doing, I never questioned the validity of it. I thought it was all useful work. Some of the fellows at Coshocton did get this feeling and understandably so. They were asked to dig a basin to catch water run-off from the fields. When they asked the supervisor what size it should be, he said, "Well, I'll keep an eye on you. You just start digging." And so they dug. Three days later, the supervisor came back, and they had a tremendous hole: He said, "My aching back: I didn't tell you to dig a cave:" They said, "No, but you said to dig and you'd keep an eye on us." He said, "Well, let's fill it up, because it's too big. We can't possibly use it." And, then, rather apologetically, he said, "I have been accustomed to working with CCC boys. You give

them a job like this to do, and they would not have had a foot depth by this time. You guys have a hole twelve by twelve and eight feet deep." (laughter)

MONGOLD: A little too Conscientious digging: (laughter)

LEWIS: So, I think the Soil Conservation Director did come to have a certain amount of respect for the sincerity of the fellows working there.

MONGOLD: How did people get along...how did you feel about the discipline in the camp and the way people interacted was good, you said? These people...were they concerned about each other?

LEWIS: By and large, the government directors of the various projects where we were...as distinguished from the civilian directors who ran the camp program...the government directors ran the project work...I felt that the project directors, the government directors, by and large, were sympathetic to the fact that they had this group of men to work with, and as long as the men were willing to work and they had work to be done, and we just weren't going to get all hassled up in our personal beliefs. This was a situation that didn't call for arguing these ideas. Discussion...but let's not get up tight about it. This was not true among all the fellows in all the camps, I am sure. From what I have heard from various places, the project directors did try to be little tin gods and convert the fellows into their own personal way of thinking. And this, of course, could lead to an unpleasant situation. It was at this camp that I had my first real emotion in race relations. I had joined up in a commune with one fellow named, Collins George, who happened to be precisely my size. We hung all our clothes in the same closet, and when somebody wanted a suit of underwear, he grabbed one and it would fit. If he wanted a necktie, or a shirt, or a suit, or a pair of shoes, it just happened to be perfectly suited for him. We put all our money in the same coffee can and when somebody needed money, he went to the coffee can and got money out...whatever he needed.

MONGOLD: This was at camp?

LEWIS: This was at camp.

MONGOLD: What was his name?

LEWIS: Collins George.

MONGOLD: Collins George.

LEWIS: Collins was a very interesting guy. He was a professor at LeMoina College, a Modern Language professor; he was a mixture of Indian, black and Caucasian. And, in spite of the fact that I was in this sort of relationship with Collins...sharing clothes and so forth... I recall one night when I was with Wally Nelson, who was acting in race relations during the day...his name appears in the paper occasionally...Wally Nelson and I walked into the town of Coshocton, which was a five or ten mile walk, and Wally didn't happen to be very light skinned the way Collins was. Wally was a black Black. As we approached the town, I suddenly realized, for the first time in my life, that I was walking with a black man and into a situation of sometimes unfriendly people...there was a mixture; some were very friendly and

others, unfriendly, and most were in-between...and I began to have qualms about the wisdom of what I was doing. I recall this with great shame: (laughter)

MONGOLD: Where was Wally from?

LEWIS: Well, I don't know. I do recall one story that Wally told on that trip...how he had been sitting in a bar, and during those days it was rather common for the whites to go slumming...this was to go down into the black neighborhood, one or two couples, sit in a black bar, have a drink, and "watch the natives." Well, this was a perfectly safe operation. It was considered quite a game for people. Well, so, Wally was sitting at this particular bar, and four white people came in. Someone at his table drew up a petition and passed it around his table to be signed. There were a dozen people or so, as I recall, at his table. He was the last one to see the petition, and it was a petition to prohibit whites from coming into that particular bar. He laid it on the table and said, "I'm sorry, I can't sign this." And the rest of them at the table said, "What do you mean...you can't sign it?" He said, "Don't we want to be welcomed into white society? If we want to be welcomed into white society, then we have to welcome white society into our society. We can't ask for one-way discrimination." And he said, "As long as I want our country to operate on a basis of no discrimination, I cannot share in any discriminatory act."

MONGOLD: Did he take his C.O. ...do this on the basis of racism in the United States? ...that he wasn't willing to fight for a country that he felt discriminated in? Or, was it because of Pacifist views?

LEWIS: I would guess that Wally Nelson...though I have not talked to him since I left Coshocton...I would guess that Wally Nelson's position was one that he was just concerned for people. I am sure that Wally Nelson saw color in other people in an 'entirely different way than I did on that walk into town. He saw the color in another person's eyes, and the sparkle in the other person's eyes, and he looked right on through and saw what was inside and what happened to be the wrapping just didn't make any difference to Wally. This would be my feeling about it. Let's see...from Coshocton, there was a request sent out for fire fighters to go to California. This was sent out to all middle west and eastern camps. And about the same time, there was some talk about Conscientious Objectors being able to serve in Japanese relocation centers. And this particular idea had great appeal for me. And though I wasn't particularly eager to go out and fight forest fires in California, at that point, I wasn't without enthusiasm for it either, and I figured that if I ever got to California, I would have a much better chance to work in the Japanese relocation centers. That dream did not come to fruition, because Japanese relocation centers were closed to Conscientious Objectors. The government, I think, had misgivings about putting the "traitor Japanese" in with the "traitor Conscientious Objectors." They didn't see that any good could come from it and only potential harm and, I suppose, if I had been a government person at that time, I would have had some reactions not knowing the character of either group. If you don't know people, then you are afraid. So, I think this was a logical position for a frightened country to take. But I did go out and fight forest fires:/ It was, I guess, in California that I noticed the first discrimination. And this was when I was hitch-hiking, and I got a ride from a fellow and the first thing he said was, "Where is your uniform?" And I said, "Well, I don't have a uniform. I'm a Conscientious Objector." "You're a WHAT?" I told him again. He said, "Well, I would have liked to have given you a ride, but I don't want any Conscientious Objectors in this car." So I got out and

continued hitch-hiking. And, in general, I would say this characterized the older generation's attitude, rather than the younger generation. When I say "characterized", I do not mean to imply that all the older generation were discriminating against us.

MONGOLD: How about your parents in the neighborhood...knowing that they had two sons who were C.O.'s, did they write you that various people, you know, shunned them, or was there any reaction? What was their experience?

LEWIS: If they did, they didn't share it with me. I would rather guess that they did not experience it.

MONGOLD: Now, you had one brother that served, right, in the service?

LEWIS: I had one brother who served in the service. And we were very close to one another. When I was in California, he was in San Francisco and I was in the Los Angeles area. He came down and spent a week of furlough time in the camp, and he was welcomed into the camp, in spite of the fact that he was in uniform and the rest of us were in blue jeans or whatever. He sat down and had meals with us and joined in the conversation. And he said one interesting thing as he left. I recall it well. He said, "Ted, of the thirty-five or forty men in this camp, there is only one that I have any suspicion of his sincerity. All the rest of them, and I have talked to all of them, are, I am thoroughly convinced, sincere in the position they have stated."

MONGOLD: Did you have any ideas in mind that you were setting some sort of an example, or that you had any mission to accomplish in this? You know, the idea of Pacifism, as an example of a community that could work and people who could get along without violence?

LEWIS: There were a few people who had a messianic feeling about it. Those were few and far between. There were a few, and still a very few, I think, who had a martyr complex about it. I remember being accused of this in Missoula, Montana, one time. There were a group of us talking and someone said, "Well, you're just a bunch of martyrs. You're enjoying this." We said, "Yes, we are enjoying it, but not because we are martyrs." And we did enjoy what we were doing. It was a good healthy outdoor life and, well, we had three square meals a day, a place to sleep, and clothes on our back. We were fundamentally secure organisms, and when you have no other responsibilities, this is all very well. It is all a person really needs.

MONGOLD: What was your field...your major?

LEWIS: I had taken a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration, and then was going on to do a Master's in Education At the time I was drafted. Let's see...what other things are of interest?

MONGOLD: Those communities where you were serving...(laughter)... they were back in the woods, most of the time. And I wondered whether the community was afraid if the C.O.'s came into town, or whether you were permitted to go into town every often, and this sort of thing.

LEWIS: We had the same leave or furlough arrangement as the military did. We could accumulate thirty days of leave time during the course of a year.

MONGOLD: But no pay.

LEWIS: And no pay. And in some ways, we were more fortunate than the military, because we weren't restricted by emergency situations in the way that the military was. And yet, interestingly enough, from the statistics I have heard, though we weren't restricted in emergency situations, there was just as high a proportion of injury and death among Conscientious Objectors during the course of their service as the military.

MONGOLD: And they got no compensation or, sometimes, I understand, no treatment. In some places, there wasn't hospitalization available for them.

LEWIS: I would think that was true.

MONGOLD: And the smoke-jumping? I suppose that was rather hazardous?

LEWIS: Well, it was dramatic, but I'm not sure it was all that hazardous. Again, I think, our jumping procedures were much safer than the military jumping procedures. We had two different missions to perform. The military had the purpose of getting as many men into a given broad field as they could, in a given space of time. They also had the problem of people being in the perimeter of this field, possibly shooting or sniping at their parachutists. So they were dropped from a height of two or three hundred feet. It was just bing, bing, bing, one right after the other. Our jumping was a very technical sort of jumping. The jump from two thousand feet was according to C.A.A. regulations, for the most part. There was one group who jumped from two hundred feet, but they were stopped. We used steerable chutes, so that we could control our direction. We had five-mile-an-hour forward speed, and some of the best training in the country to help us become expert in parachuting. Because our situation was to come down into a pinpointed spot in the middle of a forest. I recall one jump we made. Two of us had to land in an area sixty feet wide and two hundred feet long, and this was from two thousand feet. We had nobody who was fatally hurt. We had one person who came out of the plane upside down and did suffer a rupture. We had one fellow who oscillated badly and banged his back. He wasn't supposed to be jumping. He was a cook and wanted to become a jumping cook. He was sort of a roly-poly guy, and he hadn't gone through all of the training that he should have. And then our project director sort of needled him into jumping. Here were all of the fellows he was supervising jumping, so he decided that he should make one jump at least. He came out and had a bad landing and managed to get a fracture of his ankle. But there were no serious injuries whatsoever in this experience.

MONGOLD: Well, when you had finished, you were in then until V-J Day in '45, right?

LEWIS: Right.

MONGOLD: How soon then after that did you get your discharge?

LEWIS: Well, let's see. I was in for three years, nine months, and eleven days. But I don't recall the date that I got out. I went in May, 1942...I would have come out in the Spring of '46. V-J Day was August 14, 1945...I would guess I got out in February.

MONGOLD: And then what did you do?

LEWIS: I came back to St. Louis and finished up my Master's Degree in Education and then went overseas to teach at the American University in Beirut.

MONGOLD: Is there any connection in that with your Pacifist beliefs? In choosing to do that, or...?

LEWIS: Well, I guess, the strongest overt motivation was that all of my friends had been all over the world, they had had experiences, and I had been stuck right here in the United States. I wanted to have a little bit of experience. There had been one opportunity when some of us might have gone to China as ambulance drivers, but the admonition was put through, "Remember that each person that goes to China will possibly cause the death of a Chinese because food is so scarce. You may be taking bread from someone else's mouth. Or rice." And this struck me so hard. I didn't know whether I would be of more service saving a Chinese life or going over as an ambulance driver. And I chose not to go. That was the only opportunity that I had had to get out of the country, or might have had. So I said, "I'm going to find out what other cultures are like." This was my motivation. Howard Schomer who was in Pennhurst, Pennsylvania, at the time, has been a very dear and close friend over the years. He was an ordained minister and he knew his way around the field of foreign schools. He suggested that I probably would be the most interested in the American University at Beirut, that our philosophies would probably gee most closely, so I took a five-day furlough and went to New York and went up and down Missionary Row, and there were a few of them that wouldn't have me, and a few that I wouldn't have, but when I went to the American University at Beirut, we hit it off.

MONGOLD: Who sponsored it? Is that independent, or...?

LEWIS: It's a private corporation of the Near East College Association. At that time, I think they had seven sister schools in the Middle East, from Sofia to Baghdad. And interestingly enough, I talked to Leslie Leavitt, who was ultimately to become my boss over there and he said, "We are delighted to have Conscientious Objectors applying. We feel that this is an asset in your background, rather than any detriment." And, again, this is pointed out, pure and simply to show that in many, many cases, there was no lack of feeling for the person who had gone through CPS days. Not all cases were like that. The American Legion... I recall when we were in Montana, there was one post of the American Legion who passed a resolution and sent it to their congressmen and tried to get it enacted into law. The gist of the resolution was that all conscientious objectors should be positively identified by uniform, preferably with a yellow stripe down the back: (laughter) Needless to say, it didn't get very far with the lawmakers.

MONGOLD: I wonder whether...there was someone, I think Bennett dark, here, one congressman from the St. Louis area who was sympathetic, I believe. If not during the war, at least at the beginning of the war. Were you aware of this?

LEWIS: I was not aware of this. This is interesting.

MONGOLD: Burton Wheeler...and...who was, you know...these were, I think, probably connected with the neutrality and neutralist approach, the America First groups, and some of those in the pre-war period, and it seems to me, there was a resolution that I have come

across that Bennett dark promoted, but I'm not sure... You mentioned Mancos on this.

LEWIS: Mancos...

MONGOLD: Yes, where was that?

LEWIS: Mancos, Colorado. Yes. I guess this was the first government camp. There were several fellows who felt that to be supported by a religious group was not right. If the government were going to conscript us, then the government should be bearing the cost and, gradually, during the course of the war, this feeling got sufficiently that the government camp was created under strict government operation without benefit of any of the three peace churches directing it or having anything to do with it. This was a refuge for those who conscientiously opposed being in a supported situation and the assigned place for the naughty boys...those for whom the government felt, for one reason or another, should be isolated or put off somewhere. There were several stories out of that camp...all of which come as hearsay. My brother was there for a while.

MONGOLD: Your brother was there for a while?

LEWIS: Yes, my brother was there. They were building an earth dam, and they were doing it with wheelbarrows and shovels, which was perfectly all right if an earth dam had to be built and there was no other way to do it.

The Chinese have done it for centuries, and there is no reason why we couldn't do it here. But the point that irked many of them was that there were bulldozers sitting on the grounds, operable, and the only reason they were not used was that they would get the job done too fast. Then, the other objection to it was...

MONGOLD: Then, this was a make work...

LEWIS: It was a make work situation. And the other objection to it was that this was one of the early dams that was being used to store water for the wealthy farmer and the impoverished were not going to benefit from it, but rather the landed gentry. And this was felt anathema to the situation. It was somewhat like the project up in Minnesota, I believe, where the fellows were out digging duck ponds, I believe, by hand, so that hunters from the nearby areas could come out and hunt ducks: (laughter)

MONGOLD: And picnic ground things, too, I guess from Stuart Moore's letters that they objected to building picnic grounds. They didn't think that this was very useful.

LEWIS: Well, while you are thinking, let me tell you the story of a doctor who was out at Mancos. He was quite a penicillin research man, had been doing penicillin research before he was drafted, left his laboratory, went to Mancos, and saw the kind of work he was assigned to do and said, "I just can't do it. My fellowman needs penicillin much more than they need my few hours on this earth dam." So, he set up his own research laboratory in his bunkroom corner and was carrying on penicillin research while he was there. And this was before penicillin was available. The project director took issue with him and before it was finished, he was put in the penitentiary. There was a man who really had something to give to society...

MONGOLD: Now, this was one of the religious project camp directors?

LEWIS: This was at Mancos...this was a government camp.

MONGOLD: Oh, this was all government.

LEWIS: This was all government. There was nobody there to intercede for him. And I guess, you know, the rules were there, and this was one of the hangups...was the religious groups handling the camps because here were a set of rules laid down by the government which they were required to administer and when a person refused to work, a report had to go in, "My TW refused to work." The reason had nothing to do with it. I'm sure that there were many times, as in all segments of society, when records weren't kept perfectly clear as to not to try to create problems. But by and large, records had to reflect what was going on and this was one of the hangups.

MONGOLD: Do you think that the whole setup during that time was confusing, and that there was a lot of confusion and poorly administered?

LEWIS: The government wasn't prepared for Conscientious Objectors. There were considerably more than during World War I. The figures vary. I think that, generally, it was agreed there were at least ten thousand C.O. s in CPS camps...that there were another ten thousand in the penitentiary, not drafted, or in some form of limbo, and nobody ever had records of the 1-AO's who went into the service with alternate service. So the government just wasn't prepared to handle the Conscientious Objector problem and the three peace churches, the Quakers, Mennonites, and Brethren saw this as an opportunity to do something consistent with what they felt were their religious beliefs and ideologies, so they stepped in and volunteered to take over the camp operation from the government and, I think, they did this to make the punishments less harsh and to provide a compatible atmosphere, not necessarily to make the situation easier, but to provide an understanding background, rather than to have a military man with no sympathy whatsoever for this position, as a camp director.

MONGOLD: How did you rationalize, or express, your views about Pacifism in light of the type of criticism that was made about C.O.'s? The fact that newspaper letter answer would say, for example: "These people live under the benefits of democracy, but they didn't want to, ..in other words...do anything, you know, to defend it," and they would say, for example, "You know, if the Germans were ready to invade, then who would support these Conscientious Objectors?" How would you answer that?

LEWIS: Well, there are two ways of supporting a country. One is violently and one is non-violently. And, I think, to a man...no, I shouldn't say to a man, because that would be exaggerating. But, I think, the bulk of us were quite prepared to lay down our lives in defense of our country, if need be, just as readily as were any of those in the military. We were not prepared to take a life in doing it. We had bull session after bull session of...What would we do if our country were invaded? And you'd be surprised at the number of schemes that were devised and developed to frustrate an enemy in the country. How could you sabotage? How could you keep the enemy from functioning? And we realized that the enemy would take lives in retribution just as when Gandhi had his March to the Sea for three times the British

shot and finally they gave up and could shoot no more. This same sort of thing would come, and people would say, "But with Hitler, there would be just no stopping of the shooting." Well, maybe so, but we figured that Hitler could not use an empty country.

MONGOLD: Would you say the principle was more of the Gandhian Passive Resistance idea?

LEWIS: I wouldn't say "passive resistance." I would say "non-violent resistance," because passive resistance implies sitting back and letting the world go by, and this was not the attitude of CPS men, by and large. Their attitude was, "We are prepared to do what's necessary. We'll knock out radio stations, we will try our best to control the media any way we can, we can frustrate transportation systems," and if you have enough people working at this and the people of your own country are behind you and they are not going to charge you with various sorts of crime if you happened to blow up a railroad bridge, I think a great many of us would have been quite prepared to have used violence against property as distinguished from violence against persons.

MONGOLD: I have no idea what time it is.

LEWIS: It's four o'clock.

MONGOLD: We might as well keep going?)

MONGOLD: I am wondering if you have some papers or clippings or anything like that that you happen to find when you go through them...(laughter) Did you keep anything like a scrapbook? I guess you weren't as self-dramatizing as you might be: (laughter) I think you...