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Frank J. Brehon

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Lael Morgan, interviewer

Series: Lael Morgan Collection interviews

Frank Brehon said he was with the 358th Regiment. He came from Jacksonville, Florida and volunteered for service. He did his training in Georgia. They left Georgia for Camp Claiborne where they shipped out to Canada. They took a troop train up through North Dakota to Edmonton. They traveled by boat to Ft. Smith. They were shipping pipeline down the river for an oil pipeline. They were supposed to back in the United States in September. They finished the pipeline work and orders came in to make them stay and start building the road. They didn't know anything about building roads, but two men were sent up to train them on two D7s and a D8 bulldozer. They learned to operate the bulldozers and then they were on their own. They had a white officer. When they first started on the road they moved two or three miles a day. They had 43 men in their unit. He said before they got started on the road they didn't have any winter equipment. They were sent leather boots and the snow would pack up on the boots. They finally got shoe Pac boots. He described the winter clothing they were sent. Some of it didn't work well such as the woolen underwear. They started on the road in the beginning of September. It snowed on September 16th. He had to get water for the company and he had to go back five miles for water. He filled his five-gallon containers and headed back to his unit. By the time he returned to camp his hands were frozen to the steering wheel. He had frostbitten hands for two days. The mess sergeant brought him vinegar and poured it in his hands which cured his frostbite. The snow didn't stop. The temperature started dropping. On December 20th he was sitting on a dozer and he could see the smoke going straight up in the air. He said it was beautiful scenery. They then had to build huts. They built them out of plywood and the runners were made out of logs. They pulled the huts with the dozers and every time they moved they had to repair the huts. There were eight people sleeping in each hut. The zippers would freeze on their sleeping bags. They slept with blankets over their head. They had a pot belly stove for heat. It didn't heat very well, but they survived. They would stand in line for mealtime. They didn't get Thanksgiving meal until several weeks late.

Lael Morgan asked him what he was doing before he joined the army. Brehon said he had just come out of CC Camp (Conservation Corps) and volunteered for service. He was in Jacksonville, Florida where he was raised. He was seventeen at the time. His mother was a domestic and worked for the same people for thirty-two years. When he went into service he was tested. After they finished they asked him where he wanted to go. They put him into radio school. He was put into line sighting. When he left service in 1945 he wanted to go back overseas, but he wasn't hired. He went into civil service. He stayed in the post office for eight years. He then went into private investigation. He then worked in security at a hospital. After they built the Alaska

Highway they returned to the states. He was in Camp Davis. They were retrained as combat engineers. He developed asthma and he was found to be allergic to dust. He didn't have to go with his outfit. Captain Ross said he could go if he didn't want to go. His unit went to France and he stayed in Camp Davis. He then went to Camp Sutton and finally New Orleans. He stayed there for nine months and was then discharged. Morgan and Brehon talked about AWOL. Brehon talked about the continuous daylight in the summer. In the winter it was all dark. They had never experienced anything like that before. He talked about getting frostbitten. They worked around the clock. The first diesel they started out with was too light and it froze. Antifreeze and gas would freeze. At one time they didn't have any supplies for two weeks. He thought morale was good. He would go out and shoot game. He was amazed by the game. The animals weren't used to seeing people and you could walk up close to them. Captain Ross and Lieutenant Irving were their officers. He talked about how they were treated by the local people. They had to prove themselves. He talked about how they came up to Canada again. He said they drove into Fort Smith. He talked about Fort Smith and what was there at the time. The Northern Echo paddleboat used to come up to Fort Smith. They worked hard to get the pipe shipped down the river before freeze up. The men who were with Hudson Bay were French. He found out that there was segregation between the Indians and the French Canadians.