

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

HARRY LINWOOD REED

Interviewed by Dorothy Waters

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[location unknown]

Logged by Tania Jordon on December 12, 2007

A verbatim transcript is available

Original format is two cassette tapes

1 hour, 47 minutes, 41 seconds

Audio CD 1 of 2

Track 01

00:00 Tell me about your people and where you were raised? He was born in 1907 in Zacata, Virginia. It is located in the Montross District in West Moreland County. He went to local schools. At that time they only went to the 7th grade. He went to North Neck Industrial Academy (high school) from 1924 to 1927. His father had three children in boarding school. Times were tight so he had to take two of them out. "Of course they took the smartest ones out." From there he went to Washington, D.C. His first job was at the Waterman Park Hotel in 1928. He worked there until 1931.

2:01 The Shoreham Hotel was built in 1931. He worked there until he went in the Army in 1943. He served overseas as a long shore man because he was too old for what he wanted to do in the Marines or Navy. As a long shore man he loaded and unloaded ships. On June 9th he landed on Omaha Beach a few days behind the invasions. He served there until 1945.

Track 02

4:14 "We came 8 days after the invasions; we landed in Normandy, France (Omaha Beach). Omaha Beach is a terrible place on a high hill. We went from South Hampton to Normandy. We went over on a large ship then transferred to a barge. The barge would only take us half way.

5:08 The water was so shallow that we had to swim the rest of the way with our full equipment (rifle, duffle bag and other equipment) to shore. When we got to shore there was a place called Boot Hill that was about 150 feet tall. The Germany's had the place lined up with anti-aircraft guns, machine guns, mines, and pill boxes. They had killed at least 700 or 800 guys going up the hill. When we landed there was a big ditch that trailer loads of bodies were dumped in. I often

wonder how when somebody said to bring my son's body home, how they did that."

6:48 We made very slow progress. We had to keep the front line loaded with ammunition. "Boy Ole Pat (Patton) had them shooting up something. At St. Lo, Pat told them to get rid of all the snipers. He said that if any of my men get shot, we're going to come back and blow the whole town up. And that just what he did. That was the worst place to go through (St. Lo). All those bodies. They threw hand grenades in each house for blocks and blocks.

Track 03

7:57 From there we went to a place called St. Vance, France until they got a good foot hold (you couldn't hear the big guns anymore). The trucks would haul the ammunition to the front. There were more soldiers coming over so then they gave us the jobs of taking care of the camps. During guard duty, some of their soldiers would have to walk with us. Some of the camps were named after cigarettes; Chesterfield, Lucky Strike, Camel, etc. We worked there until they were almost to Paris. We went to the Rheims where they made the wine. We could have stayed there for the rest of the year and it would have been alright. They made the best wine I've ever tasted"

Track 04

10:09 "We came home in 1945. I went back to work at the REA (Rural Electric Administration)". It was an agency that would give the power lines to rural areas that the electric company thought would be too expensive for them to run lines. The REA became the Department of Agriculture. He retired from this agency in 1968. His job was an information clerk. There were four people in his department. Their job entailed them knowing each department and their functions. They would direct people to the right departments. They talked to people from all over the world.

13:13 After he retired, he opened up their hotel on Long View Beach. They had slot machines and served seafood. It was right on the beach.

Track 05

14:06 How did you get to school? What type of materials did you have? Who were your favorite Teachers? The school was located about two miles from his house. They walked most of the time. He walked with his neighbors. The school was a two room school. His teachers were from Washington, D.C. Their names were Dr. Seabree and his wife. "More than likely, they finished the 7th grade but they weren't very good."

15:21 They got rid of them and got another teacher from Howard University. "He was very good; his name was William B. Edelen. He was a military man (ROTC). He

taught them about marching and different games. His favorite was baseball. He tried to pitch. They also played basketball. Their field was on the hillside. "If you hit a ball a certain distant, you would always have a home run because the ball would roll the rest of the way."

Track 06

- 17:11 They would take there lunch to school in Karo Syrup cans. They would use old rough paper and slates to write on. The paper was like grocery store bags. Later they worked from notebooks. When he went to the academy they had their own desk, different books, working material. At the old school they used double desk. They would get in trouble with the old ink well pens by sticking their desk partners with the pen or tickling them with the feather top of the quill.
- 20:12 After they found out that the teacher didn't know what he was doing they would ride a horse about five miles to school in Montross. He would have to stay behind in school many times.

Track 07

- 21:54 There were about 40 or 50 students. They went to school about a month later then the whites and come out a month earlier to work the gardens. Their cash crop was tomatoes. They would put in five to ten acres. At that time there were no trucks so there were harvesting factories every five miles. They used ox carts to take the tomatoes to the factory. The woman peeled, canned, and cooked the tomatoes. Most of the factories were near the water. Most of the freight came by boat. The steam boats ran up the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers. The closest railroad line was about 52 mile away. There was too much water traffic to justify bringing in a rail line.
- 24:22 Tomatoes were the cash crop in Virginia's northern neck. Picking, packing, processing . . .The tomatoes were scalded by an old steam engine. The same engine would also can the tomatoes and transport the cans on the belts.

Track 08

- 26:43 Games – not much. What chores did you have as a child? Harvesting tomatoes, wheat, oats, and rye. They used a binder to cut, tie, and throw out the wheat. You could pile the wheat in one long row. They also had an Odaway Homes steam powered thrasher. He had to stand on a rail and he would drive the horse between the thrasher to pile up the wheat. The Odaway Homes tractor would use a lot of water and wood. "It would take cords and cords of wood." They didn't have gas engines in those days.

Track 09

30:06 His father would take him fishing. His father was an old sailor. His would use a windjammer to haul freight to Washington, Baltimore, and North Carolina. They would get fish, oysters, crabs, and clams from the water. They did not need licenses at that time.

31:21 They would get German Carp fish—

Track 10 (Side 2 of tape 1)

31:48 --and put them in a big barrel to bring them home and put them in a pond to have fish farms in the winter. They also had an ice house. He hated to go to the ice house in the summer because the snakes would be in there trying to cool themselves. The customers would always send their wives in the summer so they wouldn't have to deal with the snakes. Of course Mr. Reed would have to go and get the ice for the wives. One time he got so afraid because there was a black snake over his head. He went and got a gun and started shooting. After that, he would start shooting before he would go in the ice house.

Track 11

35:35 How did black folks get new/information when you were growing up? “News was very limited and very slow. He got his news from a paper called the “Grip.” “It came out once per week and the news was old by the time you got it”. “In Washington we got the Times Herald, Evening Star, and the Washington Post. His brother in Washington would send them the comic section. If they wanted to find him when he was in the house, he would be in the hall reading the funny paper. He would read Happy Hooligan, Cats and Jammer Kids, Spark Plug (the race horse), Barney Google, Mutt and Jeff, etc.

Track 12

37:57 What did your family do if someone got sick? The family health was very poor. “The doctors then were not real doctors they were more like first aid doctors.” The nearest doctor lived in Stafford Virginia. He lived in the home of General Robert E. Lee. It was approximately seven miles from his house. Their only transportation was horse and buggy. He remembers when the doctor came to his house to check on his mothers tooth problem, he was so tired from being up for two or three days that he had to take a nap before he could help her. He took a lit wooden match and held it in her cavity. It did help her. The 1919 influenza killed a lot of people. It killed more people than were killed in WWI. They lived on the highway and the undertaker would always stop to talk to his father on their way with the bodies.

Track 13

42:12 Transportation was terrible. When his brother was graduated from Hampton Institute in 1920 the trip to and from the college took four days. They would have to catch a boat for an all night trip to Washington, and then stay in Washington all day. Then they would catch another boat at 6:00 pm to Norfolk. "At that time you would have to sit up all night because there were no state rooms for you." You had to sit up all night at the rear of the ship. Then you would have to do the same thing over again to return to Montross. Some of the steam boats were called Majestic and Endeavor. There were a lot of pleasure boats like the E. Madison Hall for dancing, etc.

Track 14

45:08 What church did you family go to? Shiloh Baptist Church about ½ mile from his house. His mother played the organ at this church. His father was from Salem Baptist Church in Machuda. He can remember when they didn't have electricity for the Christmas trees so they lit candles in a cup to put on the trees.

46:56 There was always snow and fireworks on Christmas. He was bad and tied fire cracks on a cat's tail. They had to stop this because the cat would run under the house instead of in a field. They burned two or three houses doing this.

47:58 In the summer the churches would have a homecoming. The people who had moved away to the cities would try to get home to see their family and old friends.

Track 15

48:45 How did you meet your wife? He met her in 1930 when he was working at the Waterman Park Hotel on Connecticut and Woodley Road in Washington, D.C. At that time there were no set hours to work. "You had a certain thing to do and you stayed until you were done. You worked seven days per week." He went with his friend the butcher Albert Hood who asked him to go with him on a Sunday night after he got off from work. He wanted him to meet some new people on the 1700 block of U Street, NW. "He met her and she didn't appeal too much. He didn't go back, but she asked about him. When he went back things changed a little bit." They dated for a couple of years before they got married. "He got discussed about running around so much. Look what I picked out." He was 26 when he got married.

Track 16

51:46 Honeymoon was a night our and a banana split. She worked for some official from Columbia South Carolina. She was off on Tuesday so they went to Rockville and got married. His marriage license cost him \$2.75 (this was high at the time), "and I'm still stuck and I ain't got my monies worth yet." They went to

see Francis Poole in Georgetown; they had chicken and dumpling for dinner on U Street. She went to her house and I went to my house (he lived with his brother).

Track 17

55:27 Times were hard when he was out of job for a few months. He lived on \$0.25 per day. He would walk the streets and wore his shoes out. It was rough in the fall. He made it by catching up with his brother so he didn't have to worry too much about food.

57:44 He finally got another job at a hotel when somebody went on vacation. He worked his way up to a baker and ice cream maker. You had to be strong to do a lot of rolling as a baker. He was fortunate to get a job at the new Shoreham Hotel by using his baking skills and moving over with the new manager. His puffed faced patty shells help him keep his job. He was the night shift pastry chef.

Track 18

59:41 He also was good at making specialty ice cream.

Audio CD 2 of 2

Track 01

0:00 More about pastry cooking and special ice creams - spumoni.

4:14 Baked Alaska, Angel Hair, and cotton candy.

Track 02

6:05 He would work from 8 am to 2:30 then he would rest until 5:00. During this time, he usually would go the zoo. He never went to the snake house. He got off at 10:00 pm.

7:08 What did you do for entertainment? They did very little because he had to work a lot. "Of course I did drink a little whisky. In those days they had rent parties where you got boot leg, chitterlings, potato salad, and greens. He remembers going to a rent party on Vermont Street when there wasn't enough food to accommodate the crowd. The host sent out for some more chitterlings that they cooked without cleaning. "Those boys were cracking corn all over the place. I don't know if it was the chitterlings or the lousy corn liquor. I was sick for three days." "I still don't eat no chitterlings". Also got sick from bad watermelon.

Track 03

9:51 What part has religion played in your life? He joined church when he was at the academy. He was in a quartet that sang in a lot of churches. He joined Galilee Baptist Church during the mid 1920's. About four or five years after he returned from the Army he joined his wife's church, Metropolitan Baptist Church. He did a lot of recording (choir) for the church. Baptized at home. He was never very active in the church.

Track 04

13:20 Did you participate in community activities? Fishing, music, dancing and horse racing at Pamlico in Baltimore.. He attended county fairs in Montross County as a kid. He enjoyed the snake doctors and horse races.

15:35 They've had only three large family reunions. They had many small ones. The last one was held on the property of General Robert E. Lee's birthplace.

Track 05

17:15 He'd meet Miss Minnie Jones while he was in the doctor's office. Found out she was his half sister. She died when she was 106 years old. She had no wrinkles on her face and had all her teeth. She froze to death.

20:50 Do you feel that things have changed in the county since 1969? Thing have changed for the better. There have been better President of there neighborhood association. He still has 27 acres at his home place. He still has a sister in Warsaw "who doesn't know day from night." A nephew there too.

Track 06

23:18 When they have family reunions this family comes from Chicago, upstate New York, Hoboken New Jersey, Virginia (Montross, Richmond and Newport News), Canada, and California. There are about 29 people who come. It's usually too expensive for the relatives to come from Canada and California.

25:37 Long View was mainly built as summer homes for blacks. They bought the place in 1952. He and John Porter bought is together and then they ran out of money. Leroy Thompson saved them, he knew how to handle crooks. The people down here are so nice.

Track 07

27:12 When he was a kid there was a Coca Cola plant across the river from his father's property. The investors wanted his father to invest in the plant until this man

Carver moved came up from Florida and raised cane. Before he came, they hardly knew they were black. When he came he was the banker and changed things and cut salaries and put limits on where people could go.

29:04 How did you find out about Long View? “I think it was advertised. Porter knew about it. I wasn’t in for it at all. I worked two jobs. I worked for the government and was a baker.” He had 15 minutes to get from one job to another. He came down with John Porter and his wife. “This area was the old farm of the prize fighter Gene Tunney. Tunney’s uncle lived there on a dairy farm. There were no trees at the time.

Track 08

31:48 They bought three lots on the side of Redman’s place. They held onto the three lots for two weeks. The guy who bought the original waterfront lot changed his mind so he got the lot. Had 33 rooms.

33:35 The place is too much for him to handle now. Recreation facilities – fenced playground, fishing, etc.

34:39 “We owe it all to your Daddy (Leroy Thompson, Sr.), he brought us through. We have the license on the wall for the slot machine and juke box.” “We use to have good times.” He has a film the whole family on the steps.

Track 09

35:56 The little island that used to be outside at one time had a wharf. In 1954 Hurricane Hazel came through and took a lot of it down. Now it’s a dangerous sandbar with big rocks that will take you motor right off.

38:15 We had to work so hard that they did not have time to enjoy it. Now were too old to enjoy it.

Track 10

39:03 What type of awards or certificate have you received? He received at least 15 from the Department of Interior/Agriculture as well as others organization in Washington, DC and research for the University of California.

42:12 What do you think of the direction that the county is going in? It is building up fast. He thinks that the county will remain rural for a while.

