

## CCC INTERVIEW WITH PAUL BERONICH

INTERVIEW DATE: FEBRUARY 12, 2002

INTERVIEWER: UNKNOWN

ALBIA, IOWA                      Age: 80 years old

Interview questions will be in regular font.  
Mr. Beronich's responses will be in **BOLD** font.

DNR: You're very unique to us, because you are the very first one we've been able to talk to that was in the CCC camp in a place other than Iowa. This is going to be a very interesting interview. What was your hometown?

**Paul: Ashland, Wisconsin.**

DNR: How old were you, when you went into camp?

**Paul: 17.**

DNR: Were you just out of school?

**Paul: No. I quit school when I was in tenth school. I left home the second time. The first time was when I was 15 years old in tenth grade. I hitchhiked down southern Wisconsin and got a job on a farm. But I had to applied to CCC before leaving home. You went in on a six month increment. It was either April or October, that's when they had people go in.**

DNR: Did they actually call you for the CCC?

**Paul: Yes they did.**

DNR: Did you sign up before they called you?

**Paul: Yes. I got a telegram.**

DNR: So you signed up and then they called you?

**Paul: Yes. Because I applied after I quit school. I walked fifteen miles to apply for it.**

DNR: So you left school, to work on a farm and then you went into a CCC camp?

**Paul: Yes. I was born and raised on a farm.**

DNR: Was there a reason you joined the CCC's?

**Paul: I wanted to get away from home. That's another story.**

DNR: When you signed up, where was your first camp?

**Paul: Delta, Wisconsin. Camp 2622. It was a forestry camp.**

DNR: Did you always stay in that camp you were assigned?

**Paul: No. In the summertime we had what you would call a side camp. It was a fire guard station up in Washford, Wisconsin. It was about 30 miles from where the main camp was. It was a full camp with the accompaniments but it was only open in the summertime.**

DNR: Delta camp was the main camp?

**Paul: It was the base camp.**

DNR: Then when you got transferred it was just a satellite transfer?

**Paul: Yes. Then I came back in the fall.**

DNR: Do you remember what year?

**Paul: It was April of '39.**

DNR: How long did you stay in?

**Paul: Until April of '41.**

DNR: Tell us about what were your feelings the first day. You were a country boy, going to camp for the first time. Were you nervous?

**Paul: I was more nervous when I went into high school than I did when I went into camp. It was all city boys when I went into high school then when I went into camp. I came from a two room school with country boys. And then over a year with these city boys or after I got acclimated to these foreigners.**

DNR: So you didn't have any problems?

**Paul: No, I didn't have any qualms about it. I jumped right in. Well, I got along right quick.**

DNR: So you received your notice, and what happened your first day?

**Paul: Well, naturally I had a physical. The camp was run by army personnel. There was a forestry office and an army office. So in the camp you were under army. So when you went on the jobs you were under forestry. So that was the difference. But we had our physical and I don't remember if it was at the camp. We did have a doctor there. I believe he had several camps he went to. We had a dentist that came around the camp. He was an expert in drilling post holes.**

DNR: That first day was when you got your clothes?

**Paul: We got our clothes. We had a regular supply just like the army. Everything was according to size. Everything they gave me fit me.**

DNR: Do you remember what kind of clothing you received?

**Paul: We received two of everything. Except underwear was three. We had two pair of pants, shirts and a wool sweater, pullover sweater and it was nice and thick. A lot of us guys, all we had in the wintertime when we went into town, we'd have a heavy undershirt, like long johns, the sweater and that was it. I mean it didn't make a difference if it were 30 degrees below.**

DNR: Did they also issue you a toothbrush and razor?

**Paul: They issued us everything the army issued.**

DNR: Did you have anything special to sleep on?

**Paul: Well, we had regular steel bunks.**

DNR: Were you issued any special pajamas for sleeping?

**Paul: No. We slept anyway we wished.**

DNR: When you went in were you restricted on any personal items in the camp?

**Paul: They gave us a footlocker. Or we might have had to pay them. We had to have an inspection just like the army on that. We couldn't have anything else from home.**

DNR: Were you allowed to have pictures from home?

**Paul: Yes, we could keep it in our footlocker.**

DNR: Can you think of anything you wanted but couldn't have?

**Paul: We like to go hunt 'in but we weren't allowed to have a gun.**

DNR: Now, was there any certain way you were billeted in your bunk area?

**Paul: We had regular wooden bunk houses. There was four barracks. One, two, three and four. Then there was a kitchen, mess hall, and firehouse. The infirmary was between the PX and the captain's building. The forestry officers were in another building but in the same perimeter. The whole thing fronted on a 40 acre lake.**

DNR: So when you went in the camp it was already established?

**Paul: Yes. It was really nice.**

DNR: You were billeted in barracks?

**Paul: Yes. We were in barracks. We had three stoves. They were barrel stoves. One at each end and one in the middle. One person in the winter was in charge of the stoves and the generator. He would come around and throw a log in there.**

DNR: You mentioned earlier they were steel beds. Were they single or double bunks?

**Paul: I don't remember. But I am almost sure they were single. We also had our own icehouse there too. It came out in the winter right by the lake. They had a man with a team of horses to take care of that.**

DNR: Did the boys cut the ice?

**Paul: No. The civilians did. It was a big ice house. It had to last the whole year.**

DNR: Now, did you get your bedding the same way you got your clothing?

**Paul: Yes.**

DNR: Was the transition hard from country life to camp life?

**Paul: No. Not a bit. Some of the guys were real shy. We had people from Milwaukee who had a different accent.**

DNR: Did you make any special friends in the bunkhouse?

**Paul: Well I knew a lot of people there from the surrounding area there that were from the same settlement. I came from an area where there were Polocs, Slovaks, and Italians, Swedes and the whole area had different settlements. There was a Polish settlement and a German settlement.**

DNR: You got a pretty good size room in there.

**Paul: Well, we had at least 25 guys in there at least.**

DNR: Was there any snoring?

**Paul: Yes. But when you had done as much chasing as we did, I mean climb trees, and everything else, you hit the sack and went to sleep.**

DNR: Was there a change of foods, from what you were used to and the camp's food?

**Paul: Oh yes. In the wintertime, we were pretty much on a fat diet. Because it would get 40 below zero.**

DNR: What types of food did they fix?

**Paul: I'd say the same thing as the army. It was no different than what I got in the army.**

DNR: This was served in a mess hall?

**Paul: Yes. The head cook was a Swede from Minnesota. His brother was in charge of the mess hall.**

DNR: The LEM's were the older ones?

**Paul: You could only enlist for two years. You had to do it in increments of six months. You weren't allowed to do it any other way. The well, he would be in charge of the office, I know he was there longer than two years.**

DNR: Did they recognize the holidays, such as Thanksgiving?

**Paul: Yes we did. You see the local boys would just go home. I was one of the local boys. The camp was 15 miles from my home. I didn't go home every weekend. Or I would meet some family on Saturday in town. A lot of times I drove the truck into town to go see a movie or get loaded.**

DNR: When was payday?

**Paul: At the end of the month. You went through the pay line. You had a deduction sheet for laundry or a fine. If you got out of line they would fine you \$3. And make you clean the mess hall.**

DNR: So how much did you get paid per month?

**Paul: I got \$30 per month. I never got promoted. Even though I did work that should of gotten me promoted. I got \$5 and the rest went home. If I got fined that \$3.00 came out of my \$5.**

DNR: We're finding that was the set way all over. What did you spend your \$5 on?

**Paul: Well, I didn't smoke at that time. But I did imbibe a little. Sometimes more than a little. If you run out of money. There was a feller there who could loan you a dollar for a dollar and a quarter on payday. If you didn't pay it back, then he added interest to the whole amount. Some guys were leaving without their shoes. It was like that in the army.**

DNR: Anything else you could spend your \$5 on?

**Paul: There was a tavern that was far away. One thing I noticed more than anything else, those guys from Milwaukee, would take the sticker off the bottle and put it in the wallet and throw it up on the ceiling.**

DNR: Were your days off always on weekends?

**Paul: Yes.**

DNR: Occasionally you would go home or stay and go into town and raise hay?

**Paul: Yes. But why would I go home to raise hay, when I could go to town and raise hay?**

DNR: Did you do anything besides imbibing on the weekends for entertainment?

**Paul: They had Mayfield. They had a strawberry festival. They had Garwood speedboats. It was two and a half miles for a quarter in one of those boats. Those boats today are worth \$50,000 to \$60,000.**

DNR: You mentioned on the weekends you could get a gun to go hunting or fishing?

**Paul: Yes. We had a boat there. But there was only one boat we could use. We go fishing right there in the lake.**

DNR: Did you cook them or did the cook do it?

**Paul: We could take them down and Peterson would throw them in the frying pan.**

DNR: Was the Sabbath observed in camp?

**Paul: Yes. You could go to church in the mess hall.**

DNR: If someone was of another faith could they go elsewhere?

**Paul: We had a church truck that could take them into town. Mostly Catholics living around there.**

DNR: Some camps had sports. How was yours?

**Paul: We had horseshoes. We played softball. A lot of camps had baseball and played intercamp.**

DNR: Did you play against other camps?

**Paul: No. I didn't.**

DNR: Were you on a ball team?

**Paul: No.**

DNR: Did you play horseshoes?

**Paul: Yeah, we played horseshoes. In the evenings, it was mostly going to the rec hall and shoot pool, or play cards. If you had any money then you could shoot craps. But that was on payday.**

DNR: In dealing with that many people did you have any conflicts with other people?

**Paul: Some of the Indians would get under our skin.**

DNR: Oh, you had some of the Indians in your camp?

**Paul: Yeah.**

DNR: Were there any Hispanic or black folks?

**Paul: No. Just the Indians from the local reservations. There were three reservations. Within a 75 mile area there was five or six camps.**

DNR: What would happen if they didn't get along?

**Paul: There would be fisticuffs.**

DNR: We heard you would put on 16 ounce gloves and go at in the evening.

**Paul: Well, that was up to the head honcho there. In our area we settled it right in the barracks.**

DNR: So you would contact the First Sergeant about fighting?

**Paul: You would call up the First Sergeant. But he had a different rank. He worked in the army office and was in charge of the whole camp. The captain was there too. (looking at pictures) This is the picture of the lieutenant, the doctor and the educator adviser.**

DNR: So the lieutenant is who you would go through to put on the gloves?

**Paul: No. It went through this other guy. I know I have his picture in here somewhere. Here he is right here. Jonathan Selmer. He was the guy below the lieutenant.**

DNR: I imagine you had rules that you can't do this or can't do that. What were the disciplinary rules?

**Paul: We came back from the bar, about three of us, loaded, and there was one cabin there. One of them decided to go up to the cabin. I was always taught to stay on the straight road not the curvy road or I heard from my mother. This guy walked in and proceeded to light on fire the window shade. So we rushed in and put it out. We hustled back to camp. But word got around and we were reprimanded for**

**it. We had to appear in front of the camp commander. Stormier, who always had a smile, was told to get that smile off your face. We each had \$3 taken away from us.**

DNR: Was KP one of the punishments?

**Paul: We had a normal rotation for KP. However if you got on the wrong side of someone, you might get the grease tub or regular KP.**

DNR: You mentioned the educational adviser. If you did not finish school you could take classes?

**Paul: In high school, I took typing and got up to 30 words a minute in the ninth grade. In the camp, you could go to what they called the library. There was an extra room, sometimes a man and a woman, who were not related, would teach arithmetic and typing.**

DNR: Did they provide vocational training?

**Paul: Yes. Not only that but they gave you on the job training. I got so many hours training in telephone line work.**

DNR: Were the teachers from the local community?

**Paul: I don't remember.**

DNR: Okay. Was their books in the library?

**Paul: There was books and periodicals and all that.**

DNR: Did you attend any classes in the educational area that you felt helped you once you left the camp?

**Paul: Well, between driving trucks. Usually the guys who drove the trucks were army personnel who were corporals or two stripers. They were also foreman. I had a job driving a gasoline truck. In the summer they were building fire lanes all summer. I hauled gas for the tractors which were Caterpillars. They didn't run on gas.**

DNR: Did the CCCers teach you drive or did you just get in and drive?

**Paul: No. We had to take a written test. You'd go study for three weeks. Take the written test and then one of the foresters would take you on the road for the road test. They had a special way of doing the test. I drove a Model T. At that time there was not synchronized transmission, so they taught you to double clutch while you were going down the road.**

DNR: The camp you were in, what were the major projects or special projects?

**Paul: The side camp also had tree planting too. I was in the garage. The other guys were planting trees or putting out fires. There was these two civilians. The surveyor and the heavy equipment driver. When the fire call came, the bulldozer sat on the flat bed truck with a truck attached to it. We also had a regular smaller trucks with the picks and shovels and the backpack cans. We had a name for them but I won't say it.**

DNR: You worked on tree planting and then as a mechanic in the garage?

**Paul: Yes. On tree planting. There was two ways to plant trees. They had a tractor, a caterpillar, and a double Mauber pump. They would go right down through a sparsely wooded area and make a furrow there. Then the crew would plant trees about ten inches high sitting in a wooden box with a handle on it. If you were planting in a furrow, then you had what was called a Johnson Bar. It was a bar that was about four foot long and it had a spade at the bottom. It was a heavy piece of steel that was four inches wide and six inches deep. You would stick it in the dirt, pull it back, lift it up, and set it back down. You just made a square hole. You would put your seedling in the corner. Then down on the bar end you shoved it against there to keep it and they you stepped on it and went to the next one.**

Now when you were doing scalping, you had scalpers in front of you who scalped the sod off, then you planted the tree in the bare area.

DNR: You did this all day?

**Paul: Oh yeah. Your back got used to it. But the short guys planted more than us.**

DNR: Now were your seedlings, did they have a state nursery?

**Paul: Yes. It was located in Hayward, Wisconsin. It was about 100 miles down the road. We were out of the main area of Sparta. The Sparta district. That's where we got all our groceries and supplies and clothes came from the warehouse in Sparta.**

DNR: I was up to the forestry nursery in Wisconsin. I can't remember the town now. It had quite a layout there. Maybe it was Hayward. They produced a lot of trees. How did you become a mechanic in the camp?

**Paul: I was a mechanic's helper. There was a civilian in the shop. His name was Garner. He was a forestry employee. It was a one bay shop. Every morning before the trucks went out, I would inspect them for mechanical breaks. I would take a little run and make sure the wheels weren't loose. If they were than tighten it. If he had anything to do, than I would help him. If not, than I would take off on the gas truck.**

DNR: Did you ask for that job or did they give it to you?

**Paul: I asked for it. I had three brothers at home that worked on cars. I could pull a motor out of a Model T in one hour and strip it down.**

DNR: Were the people training you LEM's or army personnel?

**Paul: They were called enrollees.**

DNR: You mentioned earlier what you called the 45.

**Paul: He was three striper. That's what John Selmer was. The stripes were worn lower than regular stripes, so that they wouldn't be mistaken for army personnel. They were below the elbow and were longer stripes compared to the regular army.**

DNR: Did you know what you were doing day to day?

**Paul: You would gather in the morning in a line near the trucks. The foreman would come by and pick out who he wanted for a certain job.**

DNR: So it was a surprise everyday?

**Paul: It's just they had a main port, you had a show up deal. Like on the docks.**

DNR: Everyday you got checked off on a job.

**Paul: Yes.**

DNR: In this picture there is a man on a telephone pole. Did you go through the school there?

**Paul: Yes. I went to the school there. That's Lloyd Lowry.**

DNR: There was a school just for telephone work?

**Paul: Yes. We had one particular forester named Hunter that was in charge of the telephone lines throughout the area. If you wanted to take the course, then you would take so many hours of paper work. Then you would go out on his crew. There would be about five of us on his crew. You would check to see if there was a busted insulator or anything. One guy had the rig to climb the pole.**

DNR: Have you made contact with anyone since you left the camp?

**Paul: I just keep in touch with the local boys. Everyone within a fifty square mile.**

DNR: Have you heard of any of them lately?

**Paul: About four years ago we were up north and we stopped to see (inaudible) he was a dog robber. That's what we called him.**

DNR: Why did you call him a dog robber?

**Paul: Because any of the food that was left over in the officer's mess you could eat before it got thrown away. He was robb'in the dogs. We did build a ski jump up there. They called it the Valhalla Ski Jump. We did all the seeding and leveling up there from the side camp up there. I went out with the fellas. Somebody got the bright idea that we should slide down there. We had the large square shovels, scoop shovels. Our butt just fit inside of them. Then we would sit with the handle between our legs. We started down and we roll off, because it would drop 15 to 20 feet.**

DNR: Did you have any trouble with city boys or did you mix pretty well?

**Paul: Oh, there was one fellow from Milwaukee who could play the piano really good in the rec hall. There was another guy from the city who could play the squeeze box. Between the squeeze box and the other guy we had something going there.**

DNR: You didn't have any troubles between the country kids and the town kids?

**Paul: No. We had a pretty decent bunch of people. A lot of those kids from town had money on them. Because the families would send them money.**

DNR: Did you get along with the supervisory personnel?

**Paul: Yes. There were twenty supervisory personnel in the camp. There's one who would bad mouth me because he wanted to work with the mechanic.**

DNR: Did you ever get injured?

**Paul: Once. I had a pain in my side. We had a horse doctor there and he said it was a bursitis and he sent me down to Chicago, to the army camp at Great Lakes. I got there, and the Colonel there said I didn't have a hernia. The next day they operated on me at Great Lakes. It left a helluva scar.**

DNR: Did you have any disease outbreaks, like the measles or mumps?

**Paul: No. I don't recall any of that. We were never quarantined for anything.**

DNR: Were there any insects or rodents in the camp that were a problem?

**Paul: No. But the mosquitoes were a problem.**

DNR: Is there anything you could of done about it?

**Paul: We had screens on all the windows and doors. But when you were out there you were exposed. We didn't have too much, we had nine months of winter and three months of summer.**

DNR: Did the local community ever prepare any special event for the employees?

**Paul: No. But 12 miles from camp they had a roller-skate rink. This was back in the '30's. We had a lot of barn dances. Because in the winter you didn't have any hay. Sometimes they would remove all the cows to make more money. So between selling moonshine and home brew and dancing you could make more money than selling the hay.**

DNR: Were there girls at all around?

**Paul: Oh yes. We would meet them down the road from camp. We country boys stayed on the even deal. But the city boys were different. A lot of the city guys had cars. They had a Model A Ford. They would get boozed up and drive off.**

DNR: In chasing the local girls, did it cause problems with the local guys?

**Paul: No.**

DNR: What was your most memorable experience?

**Paul: We were in a recession. I remember people shooting deer for food to take home. We had a lot of blueberries in the summer. Just acres and acres of blueberries. They would have a kettle and scoop them into a container. They were blueberry bushes. Down south they were called Huckleberries. Blueberries are smaller.**

DNR: Did the work and the experience you got help you after you left?

**Paul: When I went into the army, they asked me what type of work I did in civilian life. I told them I was a mechanic. I was a mechanic all through the army. I was there 37 months.**

DNR: Where were you stationed?

**Paul: I went to Camp Grant in Rockford, Illinois, which was the reception center. Then they transferred me to Camp McCoy in January. I took four weeks of basic there. Then they loaded us up on a train and sent us to Ft. Riley, Kansas. I never left the place. I was there for three years.**

DNR: What came after the military hitch?

**Paul: I tried to go to accounting school. I went to, it was a business college. They said I would get subsistence pay. It was \$95 a month. I was getting married and had one on the way. I was in school two months full time. Then the money never came and so I got a job as a mechanic at Nash Garage. I worked there for almost a year. Then another fella and I went into business owning a gas station. It was a two bay place out in the country. He spent more time in town than at the gas station. So I told him, he would have to buy me out or I would have to buy him out. He bought me out. Then I went to work for 2 years at a GMC dealership. I was the service manager there. I spent too much time after work drinking with the boss. We would pull a fifth out of the desk and drink. So my wife said I would have to quit or she would quit. So then I got job with Denver-Chicago Trucking Company. I did runs from Chicago to the East Coast. I run two men there for twelve years. I didn't touch anything. I just wore my uniform and drove and never touched anything. I had the same partner for 3 ½ years.**

DNR: How did the CCC's change your life?

**Paul: When I went into the army, I didn't have any trouble at all. It was like being transferred. There was no problems at all. Lined up naked for inspection into the army with two hundred other people. The kids around there only went to eighth grade. I went a little further in my two room school. When I went on the bus to the brick school 20 miles further in Drummond, Wisconsin, oh boy I was in high heaven.**

DNR: Do you have any special memories in the CCC?

**Paul: We had more fun trapping bears in the garbage pit there. We built a snare with a cable. Actually, it was number nine wire. We caught a bear once and he was angry. We didn't know if the wire was going to hold him or not. We took off. We had a piece of railroad track and do our iron work. A lot of guys couldn't lift it up. It was about five feet long. It was our workout. When we worked out in the field, we would wear no shirt and then put them on after 15 minutes.**

DNR: Did you also build a fire tower or observation tower?

**Paul: Yes. It was by the speed jump probably.**

DNR: Peeling logs. What was that?

**Paul: That's what they used for building. You had to peel the log because of the bugs getting under the bark.**

DNR: You brought a lot of knowledge and skills out of the CCC camp.

**Paul: We had a lot of competition. We didn't have chain saws. All our work was Timber Standard Improvement or TSI. We cut out all the dead wood. We would cut it up, and the civilians would drag out on a skid. This is winter time in the side camp. We would use a cross-cut saw. We would compete to see who could get the log cut first. You really build muscle fast.**

DNR: I have a lot of cross-cut saws. There's a picture here of two guys setting up a telephone pole. He didn't use any trucks or equipment?

**Paul: No we did it all by hand. One guy would hold it up. That was back when the engines were 34 inches. WPA built a warming shelter by the ski jump. Mucky was the surveyor. He was a civilian in charge of the heavy equipment. Larson is over here. This was Smith, who was hard of hearing. These are the tractor drivers. These guys were the lifeguards at the lake here. That's the library.**

DNR: Is this the radio house?

**Paul: Yes.**

DNR: Is this the way you communicated with each other in the camps?

**Paul: No we used telephones. Up in the fire tower you used a hand cranked phone.**

DNR: Did you have a newsletter that came out every month?

**Paul: It was in the library.**

DNR: You got a write-up in the newsletter?

**Paul: Yes.**

**END OF INTERVIEW – SAM J. HAIM - SCRIBE**

