

INTERVIEWEE NAME: JIM BETTS

Interviewer: Bob Schierbaum

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DNR: Today we are interviewing Jim Betts at the Council Bluffs public library. Jim, welcome aboard.

Jim: Thank you.

DNR: Glad to have you here. Doug Coziahr is also here and Doug is video taping our conversation today. Would like to start with a few questions about your time with the CCCs. Jim, what was your home town?

Jim: Council Bluffs.

DNR: How old were you when you enrolled in the CCC?

Jim: I went in while I was still 16. It must have been in late September when I went in, in 1937. I was 17 October 7th, so I enlisted just a couple of weeks before I was 17. I was only in that time for January or February 1938 because I got homesick. They had taken us to Red Oak and transferred half of us to Clarinda. There was something came up and if you wanted to get out, you could get out right then. And like I say, it was the first time I had been away from home and I was so homesick I didn't know what to do. I volunteered and I said I'll go. That following fall in 1938, I went back in and I went to Malvern and I was at Malvern until they closed that camp and shipped us up to Lake View. I was there until the middle of the summer 1940. There was no work to be had, you couldn't buy a job. In April of 1941 I said in 6 months I would have to sign up for the draft and I didn't want to be drafted so I joined the marine corp.

DNR: That was in April of 41?

Jim: April of 41.

DNR: What did you do before you were in the Civilian Conservation Corp camp?

Jim: Went to school.

DNR: So you were in high school.

Jim: Yes.

DNR: Did you have any jobs while you were in high school?

Jim: No.

DNR: So the CCCs camp was basically your first employment.

Jim: Yes, it was.

DNR: Why exactly did you enroll in the CCCs camp?

Jim: Well, I didn't want to go to school. I had 2 years of high school and to me it was just a waste of time and I wasn't that smart, no I was that dumb, that's how dumb I was. But really I didn't, my folks, there was the six of us kids of us at home and dad always had a job. But I didn't have the nice clothes like the other guys had and I just went a couple

years and I said, well I can get into the CCCs. Dad wasn't happy about it but I just refused to go, so that's how it was.

DNR: O.K. So the next question, we kind of touched on this, what CCCs camps were you assigned to? You said you started off at Red Oak, and that one was transferred to Clarinda. But you didn't go to Clarinda.

Jim: Oh, yes, I did go to Clarinda.

DNR: And then you got out at Clarinda and you went back in at Malvern.

Jim: Yes.

DNR: And then you went to Black Hawk.

Jim: Lake View.

DNR: You came out at Lake View.

Jim: Yes.

DNR: My question is why were you transferred?

Jim: I had no idea because they transferred about half of the camp from Red Oak over to Clarinda and the reason we were transferred from Malvern to Lake View was they said they were bringing a CCCs camp group from down in Arkansas, I believe they said, and they were going to get the camp at Malvern. The whole camp moved to Lake View.

DNR: O.K. We kind of talked about this one too, but I will ask you again, when did you work at the camp, so we have Sept 37 to Feb 38?

Jim: Yes.

DNR: Fall of 38 to the summer of 40.

Jim: Yes.

DNR: Can you tell me about your first day at the camp? Anything you can remember. Did they have like an induction to the CCCs? Did you all go in together? Or did the individual people join at different times?

Jim: No, no, we went in as a group and they took all of us up there to Red Oak and they made us get down on our hands and knees and scrubbed the barrack floor there in one of their old building. And I just had on some blue jeans, didn't bother me, but some of the guys had on dress pants and they weren't happy about it. You would have thought we were in jail but we weren't.

DNR: So everybody had to scrub the floor? That was one of the first things you had to do.

Jim: Yes, on your hands and knees with a scrub brush.

DNR: Did they issue you clothing?

Jim: Yes.

DNR: Personal items such as razors, shaving cream, that sort of thing?

Jim: No, I can't remember any personal toiletries but they did shoes, socks, underclothes, pants, shirts and coats, yes, that was all issued. It was army, regular army stuff.

DNR: We were just asking the previous guy about the, like the underclothes, socks and that sort of thing, was that all army type thing, olive drab?

Jim: Well, as far as I know. I know the pants and shirts were. I imagine the shoes were too. I didn't know anything about the army then, but they said it was army issue.

DNR: What personal items were you able to bring with you to the camp?

Jim: I don't really remember. You know if you had got me 30 years younger. See I am pass 80.

DNR: It seems like most of the people we are talking to are pass 80. I would think like a bottle of booze that probably was not allowed.

Jim: I don't know anything like that because I have never been in that in my life.

DNR: Would you have like alarm clocks or anything like that?

Jim: A bugler there that woke you up.

DNR: The bugler took care of that.

Jim: Yes.

DNR: You said you had a footlocker. Could you have any personal items in the footlocker? Like wristwatches, pocket watches or any of those kinds of things.

Jim: We could lock our footlockers up, they had a lock on them, and you had a key. I don't know anybody that could afford a watch.

DNR: Would there any items you were not allowed to keep?

Jim: Well, I don't know, because I was never one to get into stuff I wasn't suppose to do or I always tried to be like that anyway. So I don't really know.

DNR: Say if your mom had a robe for you or something like that, could you have brought some personal items like that?

Jim: I had a little throw rug that I throwed down along side my bed so that when I got out in the morning I could put my feet on that rug instead of the cold floor.

DNR: So you were allowed to have things like that.

Jim: Yes.

DNR: How about like, I have a desk with pictures of my family, were you allowed to have pictures like that?

Jim: Sure

DNR: Could you put anything up on the wall?

Jim: I don't remember anyone ever having anything on the wall. Other than when we were up at Lake View, I can remember that I got one of those really nice coats. You had

like what they called pea coats, like good navy pea coats. Not that old blue one. Well, I got a real nice one. Can you remember when the streetcars run? I don't suppose you do. Remember those coats those guys had? They had kind of a big rounded collar on them. I got one of them and hung it on the wall, but somebody stole that. So I had to go get me a pea coat.

DNR: It was a coat with a rounded collar?

Jim: Oh, yeah. It was a green coat and I don't think there was any lining in it. But it must have been ¾ of an inch thick. It was a heavy wool coat, a real good coat.

DNR: Where were you put up as far as living quarters?

Jim: In a barrack

DNR: Do you recall how many people would have been in a barrack?

Jim: About 40.

DNR: Was it beds on either side?

Jim: Yes, two rows of beds, a row of beds of each side.

DNR: Were the heads always the same direction? Or were they alternated or anything like that?

Jim: In the Marine corp they were alternated, in the CCCs camp they weren't.

DNR: Was there anything like mosquito netting or anything like that? I have seen pictures of WWII type things and I wasn't sure if the CCC camp did that.

Jim: Yes, we had mosquito netting in the corp.

DNR: Who supplied your bedding? Your sheets, pillowcases, blankets and that sort of thing?

Jim: Yes, they furnish all that.

DNR: The army provided all that.

Jim: The camp did, the sheets, pillowcases, pillows, blankets, mattress and bed.

DNR: Did you have to do the laundry for your sheets and pillowcases?

Jim: No, not your sheets and pillow cases. They traded them in once a week and I don't remember it was on a certain day that you took them down and they gave you new clean sheets and you gave them the old ones.

DNR: So did they have like a laundry facility set up at the camp to do all this?

Jim: I don't remember ever seeing them. At Malvern I can remember they had a washing machine there that the guys could use but I was close enough here at home that I could come home on weekend and bring my dirty clothes home and my mother done them for me.

DNR: Do you remember any of your bunkmates? The other people you shared the barrack with?

Jim: You say do I remember their names and what not. Sure I remember Jim Brown, Frank Devito. They had a boxing club there and there was a Mexican and he was real good, Lupe Reapus was his name. He was at Lake View. He was a boxer. They had a boxing team up there. They would fight other camps. Ray Folk and I were real good buddies and they had a champion come over from Creston I believe, and Ray just beat the devil out of him.

DNR: That was in boxing?

Jim: Yes. Freddie Magee, called him Fiber. There is a guy right here in town, Art Christensen. When I went to work for the Union Pacific, there was a guy over there, and I said I know him. He came up to me one day and he said I know you but I can't place you. We got to talking and we were at Lake View together. Snootze they called him. He had a big nose. Like Jimmy Durante, Snootze Christensen. I was setting in a place in McAllen, TX and in walked Snootze. I retired in 1984 and we had a 29' Holiday Rambler trailer and I had just bought a new Ford truck and I'll tell you we bummed until 1991. I can picture places in this country that I have been and wondered where in the devil it was at, because I don't remember but I have been there.

DNR: Was there anyone else you remember from the camp. You are doing really well.

Jim: No, I can't really think of anybody else right now.

DNR: Are these people still around?

Jim: Well, Christensen is and Freddie McGee is dead, I know that. I imagine Jim Brown is dead by now. He went to California but he was a heavy drinker, always was and the last I heard of him he still was. He was several years older than what I was. Oh, Pat Wolf.

DNR: Do you know if Pat is around anymore?

Jim: No, Pat died.

DNR: He died. Seems to be a pattern. Ray Folk, do you know?

Jim: I don't know whatever happened to Ray. Somebody said he moved to Oregon and we spent a lot of summers up there and I never did run across him. I checked the telephone directories in all the towns I'd get to but I never found a Ray Folk.

DNR: How did you guys get along?

Jim: The one with an r? Real good, I never had any problems.

DNR: Can you tell me about the food in the mess hall?

Jim: Well there was a lot of grippers but I was always satisfied with it. They would serve toast and hamburger gravy, and hot biscuit and hamburger gravy for breakfast. Some of them guys called it sos you know and it just pleased me no end. In the marine corp you got baked beans once a week for breakfast. Baked beans, I never mined that. I could just get me a good plate of them and go all day. That's navy, they feed beans in the navy for breakfast.

DNR: Any other particular food things that you remember in particular.

Jim: I can remember, this might take a little while, I can remember up at Lake View they had some big shots come in because the food was suppose to be so bad there. It wasn't good. But it really improved after they had some Lt Colonial I believe, came over from Ft. Des Moines and things changed a lot then. I can remember he was a First Lt in charge of the camp there. We would come in, that when I first got up there, and get off the truck, off the job in the day and he was there to get you and you worked around the camp, beautifying the camp until a few minutes before meal time. That stopped too when that old boy came over from Des Moines. Said if they wanted to do that, don't take them to the field, leave them here and let them work, but don't work them all day and bring them in and expect them to work. It would be a full hour you would work when you wanted to go take a shower and stuff before you ate. That stopped then. I never had any complains about the food. I could always get along.

DNR: The portions were adequate?

Jim: On yes, always had plenty of whatever they had, there was plenty of it.

DNR: What did they have to drink? Was it always coffee or did they have milk or juice.

Jim: Oh, you got milk for breakfast. I don't ever remember getting any juice from the CCCs. There would be 10 men sitting at a table, 5 on either side. Was it 10 or was it 8? It was either 8 or 10 now 5 on one side and 5 on the other side or 4 on each side. But they would have 3 qts of milk on each table. I can remember that and they would have grapefruit once in a while, you would get ½ a grapefruit, but you would go through like a serving table. Seems to me, I know in the marine corp we always went through by a serving table but it seems to me up there at Lake View and Malvern too that they brought it in family style and set it on the table.

DNR: Was that the main meal then or was that just

Jim: Well for your lunches they gave you 3 sandwiches when you ate in the field. Wherever you were working, that's where you ate. You got 3 sandwiches and a piece of fruit, an apple or a banana. You would have a meat sandwich and maybe a couple of peanut butter sandwiches. The guys would holler about that, hell that didn't bother me a bit. That was fine.

DNR: Kept you alive.

Jim: I am real easy on my wife. I never complain about what we eat. It's whatever.

DNR: Who did the cooking at the CCCs camp?

Jim: They had regular guys that that was their jobs, was cooks.

DNR: But they were CCCs boys.

Jim: Yes.

DNR: Did you know any of the cooks?

Jim: I knew one of them up at Lake View, I was trying to think of his name but I can't recall it right now.

DNR: Do you recall anything special about Holiday meals?

Jim: No, I can't. I can remember the Marine corp meals though. November 10th is the biggest day in the Marine corps that is the day the Marine corp was started in 1775.

DNR: Do you remember when your payday was?

Jim: Very seldom, I know that I don't know. The first of the month I think or the end of the month.

DNR: Do you remember how much you were paid?

Jim: Well, I got \$8 a month and my mother got \$22.

DNR: I have always heard the 5 and 25, so the 8 & 22, was that a little bit later maybe?

Jim: Yes, it that is right, it was 5 and 25 and later it came to 8 and 22.

DNR: How did you spend your money?

Jim: Well, I would usual buy me 3 or 4 movie tickets. You could buy them, I don't remember what they were, probably a quarter apiece, and that would run me the month. Once a week I would go to the movies and occasionally I would have me a pint of ice cream that was 15 cents.

DNR: It is hard to believe the prices back then. At all of these camps, again you were at Red Oak, Malvern, Lake View, were all those such that you could just walk to town or did you have to get a ride somehow to town?

Jim: No, every one of them was close enough to walk.

DNR: They were all close enough to walk. What were your days off and how did you spend them?

Jim: Saturdays and Sundays were the days off. That is if you didn't have a rain day during the week. If it rained during the week, then you worked on Saturday to make that day up you stayed in camp.

DNR: How was the Sabbath observed at the camp?

Jim: There was nothing at the camp, the fellows could go to town and attend church.

DNR: But there was nothing at the camp.

Jim: No. I don't even remember having a chaplain there, if they did I don't remember.

DNR: Can you tell me about any sport activity you would have at camp, softball games, track meets or horseshoes?

Jim: Just the boxing club is the only thing that I can remember. I had a ball glove and somebody else had a ball glove and a guy had a ball we would get out there and play catch but just the two of us is all.

DNR: That was something you brought to camp? Your ball glove?

Jim: Yes.

DNR: Did they have like horseshoes or pool tables or ping-pong table?

Jim: They had pool tables but I never seen a ping-pong table. Pool tables in every camp that I was ever at.

DNR: Was that like in the canteen, was that where that would have been?

Jim: It would cost you a nickel a game to play.

DNR: A nickel a game, somebody got rich on that. Probably paid for the table. Did you participate in any, did you box or did you play pool?

Jim: Oh yes, I always played pool, once in a while I would play pool. Get someone, a friend, go up and we would shoot a game of pool, but that is all.

DNR: In the summer, did the guys do swimming?

Jim: A lot at Lake View, yes.

DNR: Any other activities like that. Today people would be out jogging or that sort of thing.

Jim: I don't think jogging was in those days.

DNR: Wrestling or anything like that?

Jim: Just among the fellows it would be all. Never any organized.

DNR: Tell me about any personal conflicts you would have had and how you would have dealt with them.

Jim: I don't ever remember having any personal conflicts. No way that I can remember of anything.

DNR: Can you remember any conflicts in the barracks of some of the guys that didn't get along?

Jim: Well they would have a fight once in awhile. But they would get 3 or 4 punches thrown and that would be all of it.

DNR: Say if you two got into a fight and I was the Lt. or whatever over the camp, would you have been disciplined for the fight?

Jim: I don't know but if him and I got in a fight, I'm too old to fight. No I don't know what, maybe they would have put them on kp for the weekend.

DNR: Now what was kp, was that something that was?

Jim: They called it kp, kitchen police, you scrubbed pots and pans or you washed tables, things like that, sweep the floor in the kitchen.

DNR: You apparently had to do that.

Jim: Oh yes, once in a while if they didn't have enough for something that had happen the old camp commander there at Clarinda, he was a bad one for going to the barrack. They sat east and west like this table is setting. The sun would be coming in early in the morning when he would have inspection and he would walk by and he would hit each bunk like that, and if a little dust came up, you were on kp for the weekend. So every morning everybody got up and shook their blankets as best they could. No dust. But that was at Clarinda.

That was the only place that ever happened that I can remember. None of the other camp ever done that.

DNR: So there was some sticklers.

Jim: There was some.

DNR: Did you have inspections as far as polishing your boots like the military?

Jim: No. Not that I can remember.

DNR: Shinning your brass or anything.

Jim: Every morning before you go to work, about 7:50. You fall out at 8 o'clock by about 7:50 whoever was in charge of the camp walked through every barrack, every one of them, all the way through and checked them. I can remember there was like a rubberized outfit that rolled down the middle of the barracks between the beds. They would wax that and scrubbed it down with dry wax, just barrel wax, and rubbed that on there and then scrubbed it down with a scrub brush and just make it shine. When you would get back and look at it, it just looked like a mirror looking at it almost. But then the fellows would walk on it, that would all change but that's the way it looked for him when he walked in the door.

DNR: Had to make it look good. If a couple of guys got into a row and stuff, was it a case that they put on the boxing gloves to settle things or was it just?

Jim: That was up to the camp man. I was going to tell you about it. Pat Wolf and the guy from Sidney. I don't know what his first name was but we called him Scrappy Taylor. Some guy got after Scrappy about something and they stepped outside and I tell you I seen that fight. Scrappy didn't hit him but about 3 times in less than a second and they took the guy to the hospital. That's why they called him Scrappy Taylor. But him and Pat Wolf got into a fight and they fought all over that camp and bare fisted. The first sergeant and Lt. were right there watching it.

DNR: What kind of discipline was there for rule breakers? Say if you had someone that was lazy, that wouldn't work. Say if someone went AWOL, do you have any idea what would happen to them?

Jim: Well, we didn't have any brig there like we had in the service. So you couldn't put them in jail. I have no idea; I don't know what they would do with a guy like that. As far as not working, if you could get out there and fool the boss, you were just one up on him. Otherwise everybody had to work. I'll tell you I learn to work there. Down at Malvern we were putting in like a dam filling a draw there. I could get the handle of a wheelbarrow in the morning and set it down at noon. You just go along a line and they kept shoveling in it there. I could get to where I could just go hour in and hour out without tiring out. I was 17 or 18 years old.

DNR: Wish we could do that today.

Jim: I am glad I don't have to do that today.

DNR: We understand there was some education or trade opportunities available at the camp. Did you take advantage of any of these?

Jim: Yes, I took some math courses.

DNR: Do you remember exactly what it was; was it like algebra, geometry?

Jim: Well, I will tell you to start out with, it had been a long time since I had done fractions and he showed me and I still haven't forgotten it and that has been 60 years ago or more. There is stuff that I had forgot but they bring you back up on and I got into the algebra. I done algebra 1 & 2 in high school.

DNR: Who were your teachers?

Jim: They were some of the guys there, I suppose they weren't just the regular guys there they were specialists of some kind that they had there for teaching and whatnot.

DNR: Were they CCCs people or were they army people, or state people?

Jim: I have no idea, see I wasn't even interested in that at that time.

DNR: Where were the classes held?

Jim: They had like a library there in each one of the camps. They always had like a small library where you could go and get a book and read.

DNR: So they have quite a few books and magazines, and that sort of things?

Jim: Oh yes.

DNR: Did they have anything else there?

Jim: Not that I can remember.

DNR: Was it a case where you could send letters home and that sort of thing?

Jim: Oh, sure. I wrote home all the time.

DNR: Did you have to write from your bunk or did you go to the library to write?

Jim: No, I just set my footlocker up on my bed and set there like this and write.

DNR: What benefits did you get out of these classes you took at the camp?

Jim: They were mind refreshers anyway.

DNR: Let's talk about the work projects you did at the different camps, what were some of the main projects that your camps were involved with, you can go camp by camp if you wish.

Jim: Well, when we were at Red Oak there was a, I don't remember what they did call it, along side of the highway where there was a little slue and it's downgrade and you go along there and make a row across it and then put straw in there and then plant seeds in there to, we done things like that and work on farms to build terraces. At Clarinda I can remember working on a concrete dam that we put in, I know I volunteered to stay out there one night and keep the pumps going so that they had just poured concrete and they didn't want that to fill up so we were pumping over so it went on down away from the dam. At Lake View, I got me a better job; I drove a truck up there.

DNR: And Malvern, what did you do at Malvern?

Jim: Worked on farms, building terraces and filling in ditches. If they had a big ditch why they would just start back here and just fill it in till it just smoked in like that instead of the place where it would wash. They would put stuff in there maybe put stakes in and put burlap in there to hold the water and so it would eventually it would fill up with dirt.

DNR: Was that along the interstates or highways that they were putting in at that time?

Jim: Yes, well there wasn't any interstates at that time, this was usually back on country roads and stuff where they were getting a wash on something.

DNR: Now did you get into planting trees at all?

Jim: No, I never did plant any trees.

DNR: You said at Lake View you drove a truck, what was the camp involved with up there that you were driving a truck for? Do you know what kind of work they were doing?

Jim: Well, part of the time I got to drive what they called the stake truck that was to haul the guys back from the camp out to the job and haul them back in the evening. All I had to do during the day was read a book or sit there or maybe put the hood up and make them think I was cleaning the engine.

DNR: I see, that was a good job, wasn't it?

Jim: Then I drove a dump truck up there. They bought a bunch of new Dodge dump trucks and was hauling sand and gravel. I can't remember where we haul them to now. But I can remember hauling it.

DNR: Were you involved with the state park that was up there? Black Hawk State Park.

Jim: Yes.

DNR: Would it have been putting sand at the beach or something like that?

Jim: Say we did do that, yes, and some of the guys worked on building shelters up there. But I didn't get in on that because I was driving the truck and I would rather do that then build a shelter.

DNR: What type of skills did you receive while you were in the camps? You obviously learn how to drive a truck.

Jim: Well, I learn how to drive a truck. I would say that the best skill that a fellow ever got out of that was being able to take order, you know, to have to do, to follow somebody telling you what to do and then going ahead and doing it.

DNR: As far as working in the ditches and that sort of thing, did you have somebody that was helping you out with that, teaching you how to fill in those ditches and that sort of thing?

Jim: Just a lot of common sense. I would say. There was 4 or 5 guys working together you know on a little job and somebody over here doing the same thing. Someone might come along and say hey, you're high over here; you got to move this on down there, something like that but otherwise, why not really.

DNR: How many people in your crew then? If you were working on a ditch or on a road?

Jim: Oh, 12 maybe 15 to a crew.

DNR: We heard about what they called LEMs or local experience men that helped out.

Jim: LEM, yeah I remember them.

DNR: Did you ever have any LEMs then?

Jim: Oh, yes.

DNR: What kind of experience would they have had or what were they good at?

Jim: Well, just supervision is all I could ever see. I had forgotten about them. Yeah, I remember them. They got \$45 a month, the LEMs and we got \$30.

DNR: Like on the shelters, were there some LEMs that help on them, like Masons or something of that kind?

Jim: I am sure there was but I don't know it for sure.

DNR: Who were your leaders when you were working? Were they state people or army people or do you remember who your leaders were?

Jim: Yeah, I can remember, I can picture them but I don't remember their names.

They had guys that were right in the marine corp. They would have been sergeants and corporals. Leaders and assist-leaders they called them then. They would have 6 or 8, 10 men they would go out with they worked harder than we did by just standing around. That wasn't for me just to stand all day. I couldn't do that.

DNR: Would they have been paid more than?

Jim: Oh, yes, the Assistant-leader got \$36 a month and the Leader got \$45. He got the same as that LEM.

DNR: Was they called leaders, not foremen or anything like that?

Jim: No, just Leaders and Assistant-leaders.

DNR: Did you get along with these guys all right?

Jim: Sure.

DNR: How did you get your work assignments each day? Did they post them on a board?

Jim: No, you would know which truck you were to ride in and your boss or whoever your LEM was or whoever was the Number 1 guy there, he would have orders and he would tell you well we are going so and so. We're going to do this or do that.

DNR: You kinda did the same thing pretty much day after day, or did the alternate your schedule on what you did?

Jim: Oh, no, you would finish up a job when you would start it.

DNR: Then you would start something new?

Jim: Yeah.

DNR: What kind of equipment did you get to use?

Jim: Shovel, pickax, I have seen the time that ground would be froze so hard you couldn't put a shovel in it. You wouldn't pick a hole that big around and that deep in an hour with that pickax. The ground was just frozen that hard, but you were out there working.

DNR: Did you ever get to operate any mechanical equipment?

Jim: Not anything other than driving a truck.

DNR: Did you have anything like a jackhammer or draglines or anything like that?

Jim: I never worked on anything like that.

DNR: Do you remember I mention your bunkmates, do remember any other fellow workers that you worked with, anybody differently than who you mentioned previously?

Jim: No, and I am sure there were lots of them but I just don't remember them anymore.

DNR: Do you have any contact with any of your fellow CCCs workers today?

Jim: I see Frank Devito on occasion. I see Art Christensen.

DNR: Is he a duck hunter?

Jim: Is he a duck hunter? I'll be darn if I know, I never heard him say.

DNR: The reason I asked is there is a lot of the Christensens around Manawa

Jim: Well, if it is winter, Art is not here, he is in southern Texas. See we spent 15 winters down there after I retired.

DNR: Did they have pretty much country kids at these camps, or did they have city kids as well?

Jim: Oh yes, just a mixture of all, I suppose.

DNR: Was there any problems between the city kids and the country kids? Did the country kids know how to work better than the city or vice-versa?

Jim: Not that I can ever remember. Not at all.

DNR: Was there any minority groups, African-American, Hispanic, Native American, at the camps?

Jim: Lupe Reapus was Mexican but he was right with the rest of us and I never saw a colored person in there. I understood they had their own CCCs camps.

DNR: Right. You mentioned Lupe here, how was he treated by his superiors, was he treated the same as everyone else?

Jim: Sure, a little special because he was a damn good boxer. You bet.

DNR: So in other words, the foreman didn't want to go 10 rounds with Lupe.

Jim: No, not that way, I mean for keeping him on the fighting team or what not, I can't ever remember of anything, he was the only Mexican that I ever saw in camp, no different from any of the rest, not a bit.

DNR: Was he treated o.k. by his fellow workers?

Jim: Sure, he was liked by everybody.

DNR: Can you tell me about any specific skills you learn at the camp?

Jim: No, not unless you can call handling a shovel or wheeling a wheel barrow.

DNR: Hard work.

Jim: Yes, hard work.

DNR: How do you think these things benefited you after you left camp?

Jim: Well, it taught me to get along with my fellow man and that's, I can't remember anything special, just that you can get along better with everybody.

DNR: It just seems that you have 40 people in a barrack and from what I understand sometimes it wasn't the warmest and I would think today there would be a lot of disagreements and a lot of people getting on each others cases but it doesn't sound like that was a problem back then.

Jim: Not in our barrack or any barrack I was ever in, those barrack was 60 ft, maybe 80 ft long and there was an old potbelly stove at each end of it and burned Iowa coal full of sulfur in those old stoves. And they had a fire barrel at each end of the barrack and some buckets there just in case something would catch on fire. That thing would freeze up every night in the wintertime it was that cold in the barracks. Everybody had 4 blankets, 4 army blankets then you had a big thick comforter. I always took my one blanket down and tucked it in and then doubled the other 3, put that comforter over them. On Sunday you would crawl out of there and go eat breakfast and come back and stick your hand down in there and it was still warm down in there. It was cold in the barracks.

DNR: Do you recall any injuries at work?

Jim: I never had any.

DNR: Was there like a hospital or?

Jim: Yes, they had a dispensary there.

DNR: Do you recall who would have been working at the dispensary?

Jim: Well, they had a fellow there, I don't know whether he was a corp man or not but he took care of it, he put out aspirins and wrapped up cuts and took out slivers and what not.

DNR: Were you ever injured?

Jim: No.

DNR: Do you remember any diseases in camp, any health concerns that came through?

Jim: No, I don't.

DNR: Were there any insect or rodent problems while you were at the camps?

Jim: I don't believe I even saw a mouse when I was in camp.

DNR: The structures never appeared to be really sound.

Jim: The structures were not sound, that is for sure.

DNR: Did you ever do any work in the local communities while you were in the camp, helping out in any situations?

Jim: No, there was never any call for it.

DNR: What kind of contacts did you have with the local community?

Jim: Well, there was some of the girls that came around once in a while but I never had much to do with them, I was leery of them.

DNR: We have heard the girls at some of the other camps. Were there any fellowship organizations, Masonic, Elks, Odd Fellows, anything like that in the camps?

Jim: No.

DNR: Well, can you tell me about any contacts you would have had with females while at the camps?

Jim: No, I never.

DNR: Dates or anything like that?

Jim: I was 20 years old when I got out of there. No, I wasn't running after girls.

DNR: Weren't chasing women, huh.

Jim: No. Matter of fact, I only really had one girl. I still got her, fifty-seven years later.

DNR: Congratulations.

Jim: Fifty-seven years we have been married.

DNR: Were there any problems with the other young men in the local communities, any jealousy between the CCCs boys and the locals?

Jim: When we were up at Lake View, I can remember some of them guys from town came down there and was going to whip the camp one night but it didn't take much to talk them out of that.

DNR: I can see that would have been a little bit of a problem when you had 40 or 80 friends of yours at the camp to help you.

Jim: Oh, that was just one barracks.

DNR: I know, how many people would have been in the camp, any idea?

Jim: Well, about 160 is the biggest I ever was at, and that was up at Lake View. Some of the others might have been bigger. There was 5 barracks there and there would have been 40 men to a barrack, but there was one of the barracks they didn't use. Maybe all of them didn't have 40 in them, but I would say 160 maximum.

DNR: Now did the officers, they were in a separate barracks?

Jim: Oh, yes, they had their own place. At Red Oak there was a captain there. Captain Packer if I remember him right. That's his name.

DNR: Packer.

Jim: Either Packer or Packered, I am not sure which it was. At Malvern there was two Lts, a First Lt and a Second Lt. And at Clarinda, I can only remember that one Lt. that came through and hit the bunks.

DNR: Remember him pretty good.

Jim: Yeah, because I done some weekends of KP, that was part of reason that I got out of there too, I didn't like that.

DNR: That was at Malvern?

Jim: No, at Clarinda.

DNR: How do you think the members of the CCC camp were held by the local community? Were you looked up to or looked down at or do you have any feeling in that regard?

Jim: Well, I never had too much associate with the town people, but I can remember up there at Lake View they would have quite a deal out there on Black Hawk Lake in the wintertime. They would have skate racing and stuff and some of the guys at camp were into those. We, I always attended those, liked it and the local people were there too and they never, no problem at all.

DNR: What do you think was your most rememberable experience of the CCCs?

Jim: I'll be darn if I know. I just can't remember anything that is really outstanding.

DNR: Just hard work.

Jim: Yeah, well, that didn't hurt me though, like I said I was 17 or 18 years old, I was about 20 when I got out of there. Young and I wasn't big, I suppose I weighed 135 lbs. but I could work with the best of them.

DNR: Did you have any odd experiences that stick out? Anything you remember like that,

Jim: No, you get to writing a book on the Marine Corp though I can talk on that.

DNR: Of everything you did, was there anything that you kinda look back at as your biggest accomplishments?

Jim: I think the biggest accomplishment I had in there was getting that truck driving job, that got me off that wheelbarrow and shovel.

DNR: Seems to me I heard someone else say they liked the survey job they got to do because then they had to hold the pole and that was all they had to do.

Jim: Yes, I remember the surveyors.

DNR: How do you think your life was changed by being in the CCCs?

Jim: Oh, I don't know. Like I said it taught me that I could follow orders and in the marine corp, I was the squad leader and I was the squad leader in combat and I know that if you wanted to be good to everybody. That's Masonry too, love your fellow man.

DNR: Now what did you do after you left the CCCs?

Jim: First thing I done, I got married. I came home in 1943 and I was 22 years old and she was 15. I am 7 years older than my wife and I thought she was A#1, and I wrote to her, that was in June of 43, and I went back the first of July and then that was the last, the only time I seen her. We wrote back and forth all the time that I was in until I got out in November of 1945. We were still writing and I said something to her in one of the letters about getting married and she had just turned 18 when I got out and we went and got married. We are still together.

DNR: Did you go right into the Marines right after you got out of the CCCs?

Jim: No, I got out in the summer of 40 and I worked on a farm for, I forgot about that until right now. Worked on a farm, Tallmans, did you ever hear of the Tallmans family? Yeah Johnnie and I worked on it. I walked a hundred miles through cornfields cutting cocklebur with John Tallman, and I worked up there for Catherine Richey. She was the one that owned the farm. I don't think that woman ever paid me a dime or penny in cash, always got it in eggs or chicken. I always came out the better part of the deal because she was always generous with paying me with eggs and chicken and stuff and I would bring them home.

DNR: Where about were you in the Marine Corp?

Jim: I went to boot camp in San Diego, then I went from San Diego to Paris Island S.C. and come right through Council Bluffs on the train and couldn't get off, stop or call anybody. Anyway, from Paris Island I went to Guatemala Bay, Cuba. And from Guatemala Bay, Cuba, I went to Guadalcanal, I made that campaign on Guadalcanal, that was 42, and I got malaria over there, and in the spring of 43 they had me back to the states. I was back here until the summer of 44 and went back to the Guadalcanal then early in 45 we got on board ship and went to Okinawa and I made that whole campaign on Okinawa and that's where I had the squad of men. Could I ask you 3 fellows, say the 4 of us went out and each one of us had a gun, all 4 of us had a gun, and we would go down the street there and say we would kill 10 or 12 people, which one of us is guilty? Which one of us killed them? Everybody was shooting and doing their best to hit them, which one of us guilty?

DNR: All four of us..

Jim: Well, I bet I killed a hundred men then. See, and that bothers me anymore, really does.

DNR: What was your rank in the Marine Corp?

Jim: Corporal. The 15th day of April 1945, my 4-year hitch was up. We were on northern Okinawa. We have a Lt. Robert Stencil, and I went up to him and I said, Say my 4-year hitch is up today and I want to go home. He said if you can find transportation, we will both go home.

DNR: What was your job in the marine corp? Was it infantry then.

Jim: Well, on Guadalcanal I was 90 mm anti-air craft. That was a good deal because I wasn't out with the guys on a riverbank and stuff, I was on the end of an airfield. 90 mm anti-air craft. But on Okinawa, why we just done it all, if we were back off the lines, we would go back on the lines and carry out bodies and carry ammunition, and carry rations. That's what we done. But I can't even talk about it anymore.

DNR: After you got out of the marines you came back to CB, then what kind of employment did you get into then?

Jim: Well, I retired from the Union Pacific Railroad. I went to work for the railroad, boilermaker welder for the UP.

DNR: Are you excited about this new library? The Union Pacific.

Jim: Yes, I know about that, but it is going to be something, I am sure it is.

DNR: Any other comments you can think about as far as the Civilian Conservation Corp that you would like to share with us?

Jim: No, it is a pleasant memory that I was there. I am glad I done it. That's the way I am with the Marine Corp, I wouldn't do it again. But I am glad I did do it.

DNR: Joe, do you have any questions?

DNR: No.

DNR-Doug: Looking back at the facilities that we have now days and seeing what you folks built for us today, it is remarkable. Have to say that.

Jim: Well, what we could do, 2 or 3 crews could do in one day; they can do in 15 minutes now with a big backhoe. I live on 5th avenue and right in front of my house, for a year and a half there was nothing but a mud hole out there, they tore all the pavement out. It must have been a year and half, I liked that, no traffic or nothing, we would come down the alley and pull into the garage from the alley anyway. But I'd get out there and watch those guys and they could dig a ditch longer than this room and wider than this table and it wouldn't take them 5 minutes and it would be almost as deep as this room. They would just take big scoopful and the truck sitting there and yes

DNR: Beats the heck out of a shovel.

Jim Yes, we did it with a wheelbarrow and shovel.

DNR: Do you remember when you were down by Clarinda and you were working on a dam? Do you remember where that was?

Jim: I really don't, but I would say that it was south and west of town. I can remember guys that lived in Clarinda and they were in the camp down there, Lyebarger. There was a Lyebarger that lived here in Council Bluffs and I bet he was one that I knew down there but I never did go to see him. He lived on 36th and 5th avenue. Say, this is 5th avenue and here is 36th Street, he lived on the northwest corner. A real nice brick house that faced east. He was a locomotive engineer for the Union Pacific. Lyebarker was his name and I was always going to go down and see him. He was one of them that was in Clarinda there.

They would go home in the evenings. After getting done working, why they would eat supper, then they would go home and spend the evening with their family, with their mother and dad and then come back to camp and sleep.

DNR: So was that ok, you could leave the camp pretty much after dinner at night? Was there any limit on how many days you could take off?

Jim: You could take off weekends. You would sign out though. You would sign out and sign in. If you were just going to town, you would sign out and then you would sign back in when you come back. You had, I believe, an 11 o'clock curfew. They would do a bed check and see if your bunk was empty and some of those camps you done KP on the weekends. I am glad you asked about that, because I didn't think about it.

DNR: KP if you missed a bed check.

Jim: Oh yes.

DNR: Was 11 o'clock lights out?

Jim: No, lights out was at 10.

DNR: Lights out at 10 and curfew at 11.

Jim: Yeah.

DNR: What time was revelry in the morning?

Jim: 6, I believe.

DNR: Would you eat breakfast at 7 then? Or something like that and then go off to work at 8.

Jim: That was pretty much what it was. That may not be just right.

DNR: When you left were you able to keep your clothing that they had issued you, or did you have to turn your clothes back in?

Jim: I believe that we kept what we had on, your dress pants and your shirt and your coat, if it was wintertime. Why I got out in the summertime, I didn't bring a coat with me but your underclothes and your socks, why you kept them, all of them. But you had 6 pairs of socks and 6 pair of shivie drawers and 6 t-shirts or undershirts.

DNR: You said you brought your laundry home, if you didn't bring your laundry home, where would you have done your laundry, did they have a place there in camp to do it.

Jim: Yes they did, they had a washing machine there. It didn't cost you.

DNR: What was it like?

Jim: What the washing machine?

DNR: Yes.

Jim: Just an old washing machine with a wringer on the side. I don't remember about the wringer, it might have even been a hand wringer on the side. I don't remember. At Lake View one of the LEMs, like this was the camp and right across there is a LEM lived there and his wife done the shirts and stuff. You could get a shirt washed and ironed for a dime.

She washed and ironed shirts. I can remember that because, I don't remember that we wore shirts to work in, we worked in, we wore jackets to work in, you know, an undershirt and then like a demin jacket or whatever. I know I always had her do my shirts for me because up there I didn't get to come home every weekend, see it was 130 miles or something like that. So I would have that woman do my shirts.

DNR: What did you do in the camp on the weekend when you didn't go home?

Jim: Up there at Lake View, you could get out and walk through the park. They had sand pits there for the breed fish, trout. Have you ever been up there? Back in there where – are they still there, are they?

DNR: Was there a hatchery up there? Hatchery is still up there, yeah.

Jim: I know we would catch grasshoppers. Boy you get out there and throw a grasshopper out there. By the time he hit the water, the fish would come to get him. We fed them lots of grasshoppers.

DNR: How would you have gotten home then?

Jim: Guys weren't suppose to have cars, but some of the guys had cars. Did I get you the name of Frank Fader.

DNR: I don't think so.

Jim: Frank was from here in town and he had a car and I don't know, about a dollar and half for the round trip. He could haul 5 or 6 guys and that bought his gas and oil and he spent the weekend at home.

DNR: He was from Council Bluffs.

Jim: Yes, but he is dead now.

DNR: You were asking earlier about Roosevelt. This was kinda a political thing, the CCCs and government P.A. and everything else to keep these people busy. Was this pretty well accepted by people? That this was a really good program? Did it make you feel better toward Roosevelt, than say Hoover or whoever?

Jim: I wasn't into any politics at that time so.

DNR: You were just happy to have a job.

Jim: I don't know.

DNR: Well, Jim, you have been most informative today and we really appreciate all the things you had to tell us.

Jim: I got quite a write up in the Nonpareil some years back, when our outfit went, the 6th Division, went north on Okinawa and took the north end. We did that in about 10 days or 2 weeks. They had a submarine base up there but it had been overrun by the time I got there. I found a diary there. Found 2 diaries there, well anyway I took them down to the intelligence. They looked them over and said you can have them, nothing there that we want. Well, I came home and got married. My son, he was born 9 months and 7 days after we got married. So I got right at it. Anyway, my son got to looking around in the

basement and he found a box of old souvenirs I had brought home. Anyway he ran across these diaries. There was a lady in here in town, Polly Hanson, she lived up here on the hill somewhere, anyway she was Japanese and had married some guy over there, Hansen, anyway she translated this one diary, this guy was a gradate of the Japanese Navy Academy, that is similar to Annapolis. Well, anyway, he had her translate it and she didn't translate all of it, but part of it, because she said he talked about one of his shipmates. Now he was an officer and he talked about loved he loved him so she didn't get into that. Well anyway some years later I ran across a couple of guys that were from Japan. They attended the church that I went to. I had them come down to the house and this one guy, I showed him the diary and he sat down there right then and went to putting them looked like chicken tracks, writing in Japanese. And he addressed the envelope to a guy in Tokyo and I mailed it. I sent a picture of this guy from the Naval Academy. His picture was in there. The Nonpareil made me a photo so I didn't have to send the original. So I sent it to him. Well, it wasn't only about a week later I got a letter back from him and the newspaper. He said the newspaper hadn't been out on the street an hour until this man came in and said I know that boy. This fellow still had 10 brothers and sisters alive and his mother and father were still alive. He said if I would send him the diary he would get it to the family. So I bundled it up and sent it to him. Then I got some letters from his brothers and sisters. They were in Japanese but Polly Hansen translated them for me and the Nonpareil followed that on through. They took pictures of us and had the story in there and pictures of the diary. Well, here just a while back I got a little write up. Dick Peterson, do you know lawyer Dick Peterson? Dick held classes for WWII and when they came to Okinawa, I brought some stuff up and I had some belts, thousand stitch belts that the Japanese mothers, wives and sweethearts, they would take this belt out on the streets and have people sew a stitch into it. I don't know where the name thousand-stitch belt came from but anyway that is what they called it. And I passed them around in there and there was a photographer from, no, I guess he was just a reporter, from the Nonpareil, and he asked me, I got up and talked about them. I said that I had washed the biggest share of the blood and mud out of them when I got them. I said that somebody asked me if I had taken them off of a dead body and I said, well it was still warm anyway. And they wrote that up in the Nonpareil. He wanted to know, he said, can I put that in the paper, what you said? I said I don't care. It was sure all right with me.

DNR: I guess I have one other thought. I have been working on this and I don't know as being the field if you would have any idea. Just at Springbrook State Park yesterday and the design of the park is so beautiful the way they did it. It is hard to believe that, did the CCCs have a blueprint to go by for some of these parks or did they just kind of, we will put a shelter there and we will put a building here?

Jim: Well, that is like being a corporal in the marine corp. You don't see the big picture.

DNR: You don't know what the generals are coming up with.

Jim: So I have no idea. But I am sure that they got a plan. Surely they would have a plan. Is the Indian still up there?

DNR: Up where?

Jim: Up at Lake View, up at Black Hawk. The statue on the north side of the park it would be pretty much on the northwest side of the park.

DNR: I don't know.

Jim: There was a statue of a Black Hawk Indian up there. He must be as tall as what this room is.

DNR: Is that in town?

Jim: Right out by the lake, it is at the park.

DNR: I will call the supervisor that is up at Lake View and find out if the Indian is still there.

Jim: Ask him if the Indian is there.

DNR: What was it made out of?

Jim: Concrete.

DNR: A concrete Indian. You wouldn't happen to have your clothes, your uniform from back in the CCCs?

Jim: No.

DNR: Do you have any pictures from that era or anything like that?

Jim: Not that I know of. People were poor back then, there weren't a heck of a lot of cameras around.

DNR: That is why whenever we do find pictures or anything like that, it is so valuable.

Jim: You know what, it is something to have lived through the depression and we always had it good at our house, our home, there was 6 of us kids and mom and dad. But during the depression my dad made \$35 a week. And we had 2 city lots that we gardened. I started peeling tomatoes at 6 o'clock in the morning and we would get done about 10 o'clock at night. That basement would be full of canned goods and stuff. Like I said, working on that farm up there, that old woman would give me chickens and she would slip in an old rooster once in a while too. Eggs and stuff, why.

DNR: Well, Jim we really appreciate your time today. It was very enjoyable.

Jim: It brings back memories that I had completely forgotten some of that stuff.