

## CCC INTERVIEW WITH DONALD EUGENE STEWART

**Interviewer: Larry Wilson**

**Date: February 27, 2002**

**Greenfield, Iowa**

DNR: Where was your hometown?

**Gene: Orient. It's nine miles south of here.**

DNR: How old were you when you enrolled?

**Gene: 17.**

DNR: What did you do before you went into the CCC's?

**Gene: Oh, I worked for a dairy. Milking cows and delivering milk. Stuff like that.**

DNR: Why did you enroll in the CCC's?

**Gene: There weren't that many jobs. Roosevelt is the one who did it. It was a wonderful thing. He was the greatest president.**

DNR: When you went to camp, did they give you clothes? Toilet articles?

**Gene: Clothes. There was a PX to buy the toiletries.**

DNR: Did you have any personal items?

**Gene: Not that much. I remember my dad drove a 1928 Dodge.**

DNR: Where did you sign up?

**Gene: Not certain, it may have been here in Greenfield.**

DNR: How did the CCCs benefit you?

**Gene: It was like a preschool for the army. It really helped me later in life.**

DNR: Were you ever away from home before?

**Gene: A little bit.**

DNR: Was there anyone homesick?

**Gene: No. Everyone who wanted to be there, wanted to be there in the CCC's.**

DNR: When you were assigned to the barracks, what was the procedure?

**Gene: There was a barracks leader for each barracks. He was like a sergeant in the army. You had bed check. You had reveille. You learned how to make a hospital bed. We had to buy a footlocker. They took that out of the check until it was paid for.**

DNR: Were you issued blankets or bedding?

**Gene: Army issued.**

DNR: Your barracks were wooden?

**Gene: Right.**

DNR: What kind of heat did you have in there?

**Gene: Pot Belly stove, some burned wood, some coal.**

DNR: Do you remember any of the guys from the barracks?

**Gene: Not in my actual barracks. But I remember one guy from Orient. He was kind of sticky fingers. He was at the camp. He wasn't there too long. He isn't alive. He stole a razor from one of the other guys. We had a trial in front of the company commander. You could appoint anyone as his lawyer. I was the only one he knew, so he appointed me. He thought I was going to lie for him. But I didn't. He was discharged from the camp for stealing. It is the only instance I know of, of someone stealing.**

DNR: You guys get along okay in the barracks?

**Gene: All the guys were super.**

DNR: How was the food in the mess hall?

**Gene: Right. That's another thing I did was work in the mess hall. I worked with the work crews, the rest of the time I worked as a dog robber. Have you ever heard of what a dog robber is?**

DNR: What, did you wait on officers?

**Gene: Right. You know I waited on them. There was a room off the mess hall where they took their meals. A round table in there. I would get food from the mess hall and put it into bowls and bring out the food. I made their toast for them. I set the table with silverware. Now, in the mess hall it was just like the army. You would eat off the tray and go through the line. When they were through I would clean off the table and I would take care of their barracks. Now the state guys also ate in the officer's dining room. They were part of the administration.**

DNR: Why did they call them dog robbers?

**Gene: Because no one else wanted to do the job. I found out that the kid who was the dog robber was going to leave. I found out from the state people, that I got additional money from them in addition to my monthly pay. So I did it.**

DNR: Who did the cooking?

**Gene: Army cooks. The kids had to pull KP though.**

DNR: How many holiday meals were special?

**Gene: I only went home twice while I was there. There wasn't anything special. But there was always plenty of food. When I was a dog robber, I ate after the officers ate.**

DNR: Mess hall was a separate building?

**Gene: Right.**

DNR: When did you get paid?

**Gene: It was once a month. I don't remember what day it was.**

DNR: How much did you get paid?

**Gene: I only got \$30 a month. But I kept very little of that. First, they deducted for my footlocker. Then I sent a lot home to help my mother. She had little kids at home. I got to keep some. I kept about five or six dollars. We had no place to spend it. The trucks went to Guthrie Center once a week. Usually on the weekends. If you had a pass you could go. It was real easy to get a pass unless you were a bad boy. I remember one café, you go in there and buy a banana split. I tell you it was the biggest thing you ever saw. It was on a boat. They put several scoops of ice-cream with syrup and nuts. That was our highlight of going to Guthrie Center. One night we had a 'green' driver driving us in this army truck, and we were approaching the main gate, where there were a lot of potholes. It was a '35 Ford truck, V-8, with cable brakes. He got it going as fast as it could go, and then he took it out of gear and we went half way up the next hill then turned around to go back down to the main gate.**

DNR: Did you have weekends off?

**Gene: Yeah. One dog robber didn't. We weren't allowed to have cars. We had a leader in our barracks. You might call him a horse's patoot. When the lights went out he would go down a rope, then go to his car in the woods and then go to town. They never caught him. First thing, this one guy did, he got three raw eggs and put it in between his sheets. He couldn't squawk about it, because he would get caught. So he slept without sheets. Another time the same guy took his rope away. This forced him to go to the main gate where he would get caught. Everybody knew who did it. But no one would snitch him out. He was so angry. He made it known he wanted to know who did it.**

DNR: Did you have church services on Sundays?

**Gene: Yes we did. We also had motor pool training. Classes on the campgrounds. They had a garage and a tool shed. We did everything by hand. They would teach you things like the firing order of a 6 cylinder Chevrolet, which is 153624.**

DNR: Did you use any of those skills after you left the camp?

**Gene: Absolutely. I was a mechanic for a construction company. I started in '42. Then I went into the army in March of '43. Then I come back in the last part of '45. I went right back to the same company and worked there until 1992. Then I quit. Schildberg Construction here in town was where I worked.**

DNR: You learned some of this in the CCC's?

**Gene:** Well some of it course. In the army, they asked for volunteers for truck drivers. I learned in the C's the best thing was to keep a low profile and not to volunteer for anything. But don't stand out among the crowd, see. Just fit in to everything. You get along a lot better, than making a damn fool of yourself or whatever. And trying to be a smart ass. In the army they asked for volunteers for truck drivers. It was easy for me. So, when they asked I kept my hand down. Those who raised their hands had to go push wheelbarrows. Those who did not raise their hand were sent to a room to take the truck driving test. In this test, you had to draw a diagram of the truck. For instance the engine distributor, the starter, the ignition firing, and you had to draw wires to where everything went. I saw that and thought this is a snap. I learned how to do it in the C's. So, I drew lines where they went, and just put my pencil down. The instructor came by and said, "You'd better hurry up and get started or you won't get done." I said, "I'm done." He said, "You can't be." I am. He said, "Okay. I warned you." I got 100% right. I learned so many things in the C's. I was a truck driver for a long time.

DNR: Were you overseas or were you here in the service?

**Gene:** I was in the ETO (European Theatre Operations). I've seen "Big Ben" in London, the Eiffel Tower and Arch de Triumph in Paris, The Fountain in Brussels, and the windmills of Holland. I was in nine different countries.

DNR: Okay. Any sporting activities in the camp?

**Gene:** The only thing I remember is them teaching me how to box. They would throw numbers in a hat. If your number matched another number then the two of you would box, regardless of height or weight. You had to box. I pulled my number out and the other guy was HUGE. I weighed around 100 pounds. I put the gloves on and I was petrified. I knew he was just going to murder me. I don't know why I did it, but when that bell rang, I just ran to the other side of his corner and I came from the back, and I hit that guy as hard as I could, I poured it on, and the guy never got his fists up. He just turned around and I nailed him. I knocked him down there, and tears welled up in his eyes, he held his hands up and said to the referee, 'take them off, I'm not fighting that guy.'

DNR: Were there ballgames?

**Gene:** Yeah.

DNR: Was there a recreation hall?

**Gene:** No.

DNR: Did you have any personal conflicts with anyone in the camp?

**Gene:** No.

DNR: How were conflicts resolved in the camp?

**Gene:** Outside of the guy with the razor there weren't any conflicts. But it was the same procedure as with him.

DNR: Were there any problems in the barracks?

**Gene: None at all.**

DNR: What kind of projects did you guys do in the camp?

**Gene: Well, they were in the process of building a lake or pond. Do you know where the shelter house is? I worked on that a little bit. I helped prepare the ground to build cabins. In the winter we would go to the quarry and shovel gravel into trucks. Then we would put the gravel on the trails.**

DNR: Where was the gravel pit?

**Gene: It was north of the main gate. Several miles to the north and then to the east.**

DNR: So you worked on the shelters, hauled gravel, worked on the dam some.

**Gene: Not the dam much.**

DNR: Did you pick up any special skills?

**Gene: What I learned in the motor pool really helped.**

DNR: Was it motor repair?

**Gene: Just how to maintain vehicles. We didn't repair anything.**

DNR: Do you remember who trained you?

**Gene: No.**

DNR: Did everybody get along in training?

**Gene: Yes.**

DNR: So what else did you do?

**Gene: I was the dog robber for half the time I was there.**

DNR: When you were the dog robber, was that your entire job?

**Gene: That's all I did.**

DNR: How did you get your assignments?

**Gene: We would fall out of line and the foreman would tell us. Max Bird was the superintendent. He was the project superintendent for the whole camp and the foreman worked underneath him.**

DNR: Were the foreman's member of the C's?

**Gene: I think they were in the C's and not civilians.**

DNR: How many do you think were on a crew?

**Gene: They would vary from 10 to 12.**

DNR: Any special equipment used?

**Gene: Wheelbarrows, shovels, picks, axes.**

DNR: This came out of the tool shed?

**Gene: Right.**

DNR: Did you guys get along okay?

**Gene: Yeah.**

DNR: So were the same guys on the work assignments the same as the guys in the barracks?

**Gene: Yes.**

DNR: Did you have city boys in the camp?

**Gene: It was about equal.**

DNR: Did they all get along?

**Gene: Yes.**

DNR: Did you have any minorities in the camp?

**Gene: No.**

DNR: Did you learn any special skills in the camp?

**Gene: Well, I don't think so.**

DNR: Was the motor pool work new to you?

**Gene: My dad was a mechanic. I didn't learn much from him.**

DNR: But you did go to the motor pool school?

**Gene: Right.**

DNR: Were there any injuries in the CCC's?

**Gene: No.**

DNR: Were you ever injured in the CCC's?

**Gene: No.**

DNR: If someone got hurt was there a doctor?

**Gene: They had a doctor. They had a dispensary and they had a car to drive you to the hospital. They had a dentist.**

DNR: Were there any diseases?

**Gene: No.**

DNR: Were there any rodents or insect problems in the camp?

**Gene: No.**

DNR: Did you do any work outside the camp?

**Gene: Just the gravel work.**

DNR: Did you have any contacts outside the camp?

**Gene: No.**

DNR: Were there any contacts with any Masonic organizations?

**Gene: No.**

DNR: Did you have any contacts with females while in the camp?

**Gene: Absolutely not. I didn't have any vices outside of cigarettes.**

DNR: Were there any problems with young men in the community?

**Gene: No.**

DNR: How was the captain liked by the community?

**Gene: I don't think so.**

DNR: Any memorable experiences in the camp?

**Gene: Just defending that thief in front of the company commander, Mr. Grier.**

DNR: Did you have any odd or strange experiences?

**Gene: I once had a guy who wanted me to take a picture of him, naked in a bathtub. I asked him why and he said he wanted to send a picture to his wife. I told him you're asking the wrong guy.**

DNR: Did you report him?

**Gene: It was an officer. I never heard a word about it again. He treated me like anyone else.**

DNR: What do think your biggest accomplishment at the camp?

**Gene: Getting through the camp and not having any problems.**

DNR: How do think your life was changed being in the C's?

**Gene: I think you grew up a little faster.**

DNR: What did you do after the CCC camp?

**Gene: I went to go work on a farm until I got hired at Shildbergs.**

DNR: Somewhere in there you went into the army?

**Gene: Yes. March '43.**

DNR: How long were you in the army?

**Gene: Almost three years.**

DNR: Then back to Shildbergs?

**Gene: Yeah. Retired in '92 and I was the foreman. I sent the trucks out and went with them to make sure things worked the way they were supposed to. (looking at pictures). This is my brother Frank.**

DNR: It says here you were assigned to a chemical warfare unit in Paris, France. What does that mean?

**Gene: Chemical warfare service. First, I was three months in basic training. I was a toxic gas handler in Gatson, Alabama and did it for 12 months. We used all sorts of chemicals including chemical shells. All sorts of poison gas. I spent some time in Pennsylvania waiting to go overseas. This is a copy of my discharge. I was in Normandy, came through Omaha Beach. I was at the Battle of the Bulge and the Ardennes. I was scared but glad I never got the Purple Heart. I received one Silver Star which is equal to five battle stars. I needed so many points to get out of the army.**

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

**Updated by Larry Wilson after review with Donald Eugene Stewart on July 14 & 19, 2005.**