

INTERVIEWEE NAME: OWEN BEAMAN

Interviewer: Bob Schierbaum
May 17, 2002

DNR: It is May 17, 2002. I am Bob Schierbaum and I am interviewing Owen Beaman in Arispe, Iowa. Owen, glad to talk to you today.

OWEN: Glad to have you

DNR: Could you tell me where your hometown is?

OWEN: Right now it is Aprise, IA.

DNR: Before you were in the CCC, what was your hometown?

Owen: I lived on a farm about half way between Murray and Hopeville, in Doyle Township, Clark County.

DNR: Do you know what year it was when you went in to the CCC camp?

Owen: Seems like to me it was 1932, I believe.

DNR: 1932?

Owen: I'm not right positive about that.

DNR: What did you do before you were in the CCC camp?

Owen: Lived on a farm and did regular farm work. Just whatever came along to make a buck.

DNR: Why did you enroll in the program?

OWEN: By golly you had to eat and that was the depression. My mother, my dad had died, and she got \$25 a month and I got \$5 a month and my board and clothes. That was grocery money for her after all. There wasn't such a thing as all the programs like they have now a days.

DNR: No unemployment or anything else. You had to work or you didn't eat.

OWEN: That's right. Like my brother said one time, if it wasn't for sheep containmentation we probably would have starved to death, eating rabbits and stuff like that, you know hunting.

DNR: Sure. What camps were you assigned to?

OWEN: 769 at Indianola. We built Lake Ahquabi up there.

DNR: Were you ever transferred?

OWEN: No.

DNR: O.K. Can you tell me about your first day at camp? Anything you remember about how you were -

OWEN: Well there wasn't no, they didn't have no building then. They had taken an old - out there was a fair grounds at Indianola and there was an old shed there they had made into a latrine and a shower house. And they set up these, well the army called them hospital camps. You know what I mean. And that's what we lived in. And they set up a kitchen in one of the old barns that had been there. That's how we lived. And they built barracks, just old cheap barracks, and we lived in them. They weren't lined or anything, They were up off the ground, but they had two stoves in every one of them, big old pot belly stoves. They would freeze the fire bucket up about all the time but we had lots of blankets and the food was good. Can't complain about the food. It was just army rations.

DNR: Did you have to go through like a physical? Did they like check your eyes, check your teeth? Give you shots or anything like that?

OWEN: We took shots, but they didn't check our eyes the way I remember it, or our teeth or anything like that.

DNR: They give you some uniforms?

OWEN: Just work clothes. Most of them were pants and fatigues, army fatigues. I guess finally they did issue us ODs.

DNR: Did you have any personal items that you were able to take with you to the camp?

OWEN: I suppose, toothbrush and razor and so on and so forth. I suppose we did, anyhow it seems like we did but they issued you them too.

DNR: Those were issued too.

OWEN: Probably took them in because we didn't know what they were issuing when I went in.

DNR: Were there any items you were not allowed to bring with you?

OWEN: I don't suppose we were allowed to take any guns or anything like that.

DNR: O.K. Sure.

OWEN: I never had that question ever come up before.

DNR: Well, we are trying to ask some of the questions that probably has not been asked before.

OWEN: Well, that sure would be one of them.

DNR: You were first put up in hospital tents and then you were eventually put in barracks.

OWEN: Out there at the fairgrounds in Indianola.

DNR: How long do you think you were in the tents before the barracks were built?

OWEN: I don't know, probably 6 months I imagine, I know it was getting pretty cold weather when we got out of the tents.

DNR: I see, who supplied your bedding and your sleepwear? Was that provided by the military?

OWEN: Yes.

DNR: Do you recall what you had for blankets and sheets?

OWEN: The blankets were GI blankets and the sheets were regular sheets. Then we had a comforter. Our bedding and everything, it was all right. It was issued just like they issued the troops. We were suppose to get regular army rations and so I reckon that's the way it was.

DNR: Do you remember who your bunk mates were? Or anyone else you would have roomed with there in the barracks.

OWEN: Oh, yes, I can remember some of them. There was Jim Weaver was one of them. And oh, by golly, Harold? Harold Loudon, no not Loudon, but Harold, he was from Lacona, I can't say his last name, and a fellow by the name of Kline, Carl Kline. I just remembered them names off hand. There was a fellow by the name of, – pert nearly said his name, but can't say it now.

DNR: Well if you think about it.

OWEN: It don't matter anyhow.

DNR: Did you guys get along o.k.?

OWEN: Oh, yeah, we got along all right. We might as well get a long. It was just like being in the military. You get along.

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

OWEN: Just regular army rations. It was all right.

DNR: Who did the cooking?

OWEN: They had cooks, they sent men who wanted to be cooks, they sent them up to the fort and they went to cooking school. Some of them they transferred in. I remember one time we got a cook, he was a Mexican. I don't know where they transferred him from, but boy was he a good cook. He didn't stay long with us, they took him to Des Moines to the fort, up to headquarters as a cook. They had a baker, oh what was his name, well it doesn't make any difference anyhow. I can't think of his name. But he was a good baker. He would come out and bake them at night. He would bake bread and rolls, different things like that. He was a good baker. We called him an old man. He was probably 45 or 50. He would come out and work at night. Bake bread, big old loafs of bread, he was a good baker.

DNR: Do you remember anything special about holiday meals?

OWEN: Well, they were pretty good meals. Well now on Thanksgiving they would have turkey and so on, just like pumpkin pie. The same at Christmas time they would have. On Sunday night that was usually cold cuts and sandwiches and stuff like that. But the food was all right. The food was all right. Now that I think about it they did bitch about it but a bunch of men always bitches.

DNR: In one of my other interviews they told me that you were not allowed to bitch about the food. And so one guy was talking about, I think they had ham, and he said, boy this ham is salty, then he said, just the way I like it. But he did it in such a way that it wasn't complaining.

DNR: When was payday?

OWEN; The end of the month.

DNR: How much were you paid?

OWEN: We were paid, we got \$5.00. And our folks or mother got \$25.00. And if you were like me, some of the other fellows when they were on kp or something and a lot of them got all their money back anyhow through their parents. Maybe they would give me a \$1 to work their kp or something like that. I jumped at every one of those chances I could get.

DNR: Anytime you could get a chance to make a buck.

OWEN: Yes, I would take it.

DNR: How did you spend your money?

OWEN: Well, most of it, just the \$5, went for tobacco and little stuff like that. Maybe for a candy bar once in a while or a bottle of pop.

DNR: I assume tobacco was pretty cheap back then.

OWEN: Oh, yeah, it wasn't too high. I forget now. Seems like a carton of cigarette, you see if you were in a camp and the government had that camp, you didn't pay no state tax on that tobacco. Just like it use to be up at Des Moines at the fort, you would go in buy cigarettes but they got over that, in fact I don't think they have them anymore, but you didn't pay any tax on it. That was federal government property.

DNR: So it was cheap cigarettes. Not pipe tobacco, or did you ever smoke a pipe or not.

OWEN: Oh, yeah I use to smoke a pipe. Cigarettes, a cigar once in a while. About 40 years ago or so, maybe 50 years ago, one of the doctors at the hospital said I am

not going to tell you to quit smoking, but I am going to you, you better quit. That was it, I just quit like that.

DNR: Well good. What were your days off?

OWEN: Sundays, Saturday and Sundays, legal holidays.

DNR: How did you spent your days off?

OWEN: Just stayed in camp mostly and maybe went up town to the show that night or something like that, the theater.

DNR: How were Sabbaths observed in camp?

OWEN: How is that?

DNR: How was Sundays observed in camp? Were there church services or anything like that.

OWEN: Oh yeah, you could go to church services, you betcha.

DNR: Was there anything in the camp itself, or did you have to go to town?

OWEN: Yeah they had church services in the camp and they had a state chaplain that came about in once a month or so, maybe more often out of Des Moines. He visited all the camps and they had a meeting when he came. Oh, yes, if you think about it now, it was run pretty efficiently. But at the time we didn't think so, I suppose. You know how things like that goes.

DNR: Was there any sports activities in camp?

OWEN: Oh yes, we had a ball team.

DNR: Was that a baseball or basketball?

OWEN: Baseball and softball both. Yes, I played on both of them some. Not very much, I was never much of a ball player. But I acted like I could.

DNR: Was there any other sport activities?

OWEN: Oh yeah, they would have swimming. After they got the lake out at Ahquabi, we had swimming instructors out there.

DNR: Ok, did they have like horseshoes, pool tables, ping-pong tables, and those things.

OWEN: Oh, yes, yes.

DNR: How about boxing matches?

OWEN: Yeah, they had them too. And punching bags. Yes, it was, you know for the times and everything it was run pretty efficiently. We didn't think so at the time, we bitched all the time of course. If you weren't bitching, you were in trouble.

DNR: Did you ever have any personal conflicts with any of the other guys?

OWEN: No, I don't know as I ever did myself. I saw a few little deals.

DNR: How were the other conflicts deal with if two of the other guys got into it?

OWEN: Well, I've know them to just put the boxing gloves on them and set them in the ring and settle it that way. I saw that a time or two. I remember one time; I guess this was when I was at Melcher though, out in California, we had a big fellow in our camp. He was a little older than most of the guys at that time. A fellow by the name of Beck. If he could run over some body he would just heckle them all the time. We had a fellow from Montana, a young like fellow. I don't know why Beck would pick on him. It just continued. Then one evening after supper coming out of the mess hall, this fellow just waited, there was about 3 or 4 steps going into the mess hall, anyway he just waited down there. When Beck came out, he said we might as well settle this now. I am getting tired of being picked on. That Beck was a

big man and he came down right down toward him. That fellow didn't have a chance. This other fellow really wobbled him good.

DNR: Oh really. You said this was in the military?

OWEN: Yes. And after it was over with, we separated them and Beck went to the barracks and then he went over and talked to the company commander. He was bruised up some, he said this fellow picked on him. The company commander said it is too bad you fell down stairs. He said go over to the medics and get patched up. That took care of that.

DNR: If you had someone that was breaking the rules what kind of punishment would they get?

OWEN: Oh probably a weekend of KP or something like that.

DNR: How about if someone went AWOL? If they just didn't come back, would they go after them or anything?

OWEN: No, not in the CCC camps they wouldn't. After they were gone so long a time, they would just send them a discharge. I don't remember what kind it was, it wasn't a regular discharge but it wasn't a dishonorable discharge, it was a, what did they call them. I've forgotten what they called them. Yellow or something like that. I have forgotten just what word they used for that kind of a discharge. But their discharges from CCC camps didn't amount to much anyway. It was a little different than a discharge from the army.

DNR: We heard that there was some educational or trade opportunities in the camp. Can you tell me about any of those?

OWEN: Well they had a typing class. I never took that and they had a mechanic class and a welding class. Actually they had a start of a surveying class running an instrument that surveyed contours drainage and terraces and stuff like that. I did quite a bit of that. There was nothing to that.

DNR: O.K. you took the surveying, did you take the welding or the mechanic class or not?

OWEN: Oh, I did a little welding. But I didn't like to weld on account it always gave me a headache.

DNR: O.K. who were your teachers then?

OWEN: They were State men.

DNR: Were they Forest Service people or Department of Agriculture people or do you have any idea who they worked for?

OWEN: I think they worked for the State Conservation, National, they were National Parks Service. We had one work superintendent. His name was, no, funny I can't say his name. His name was Duran, Pop Duran. I don't know what his first name was, everyone called him Pop. He had been an engineer down on the south coast putting in seawalls. I suppose that blowed up and they sent him up there as the head engineer.

DNR: So he was an engineer? OK.

OWEN: And there was an old man, I can't remember his name. He was old, we thought he was old, but he was a good engineer. He was probably 50, 55 or 60. Dress like an old man. And he had worked for the government and he told us about a tunnel they had built out in the mountains there someplace. They were building a road. One of those tunnels they built. And he started at one end and another

engineer started at the other end and they met when they got together. He said they wasn't over an inch or so off.

DNR: That's pretty good.

OWEN: That's what he told us anyhow.

DNR: Where were these classes held that they took?

OWEN: Oh, they were in the camp in the mess halls mostly. And then they had a class up at Simpson College in Indianola, on, I can't recall what it was called, about the weather.

DNR: Meteorology or something like that.

OWEN: Yeah something like that. It was pretty broad. I know I went up to it all the time.

DNR: Was that taught by Simpson College people?

OWEN: Well, I don't really know. I think maybe they just used the college.

DNR: Just used the classroom. What benefits did you get out of these classes that you took?

OWEN: Well, you can't go to any classes without gaining a little knowledge. I never knew anybody in my life that had enough knowledge.

DNR: Did it help you out in later life?

OWEN: Oh, Yes, I think so, I think so. I know one thing I learned that is reading stakes and stuff like on that building road and streets and stuff . Gray stakes and all that kind of stuff.

DNR: You learned all that while in the CCCs?

OWEN: Yeah.

DNR: OK let's talk about some of the work that your camp did. What was some of the main projects the camp was involved in?

OWEN: Building Lake Ahquabi, putting in the dam, so on and so forth, clearing the timber off where the lake stands now. Putting in the dam and so on. Building the roads in there, the parking lots, the campground, putting up the shelter houses, the bathhouses, the beach, the water system, putting the pump house in, taking the water out of the lake and running it through a purification plant, piped it up to the custodian's house. Put the drinking fountains up in the campground.

DNR: Pretty complete there.

OWEN: You couldn't help but get a little knowledge doing all that kind of work.

DNR: Did the CCC build the custodian's house?

OWEN: Yes.

DNR: OK

OWEN: The lodge that is up there and the bath house and all that. The CCC boys built them.

DNR: O.K. What particular projects were you involved with? Were you involved with all of those?

OWEN: Yes, most of them. My work, I usually, I was on machinery most of the time. We didn't have dozers then, we had a tumblebug and a cat.

DNR: Tell me what a tumblebug is, I have heard that before but I don't know what a tumble bug is.

OWEN: A tumblebug is just nothing but a, it is not an old horse scraper, but something like that. Put it behind the cat and you had a rope you tripped it, I don't

know how wide it was anymore it has been so long ago. You tripped it and it rolled and dumped the dirt out.

DNR: So it was the means of being a scrapper, although you didn't have a scrapper.

OWEN: That's what we used then. We didn't have, I don't know why we didn't have a scrapper, they made them then, but we never had one there. We had a cat, I run the cat most of the time.

DNR: Were you pretty much involved with clearing where the lake was going to be?

OWEN: No, I never did a great deal of that. Had different men that did that.

DNR: It kinda sounds like you were there from the get go, when you first went to Ahquabi, what was there?

OWEN: A big old worn down farm with a lot of cockleburs and worn out corn fields.

DNR: That is all that was there?

OWEN: Yeah.

DNR: There wasn't any development at all.

OWEN: No.

DNR: So you guys started it from the get go.

OWEN: That is right.

DNR: So what is the first project at Ahquabi you started with? Can you remember?

OWEN: They were clearing the lake bed.

DNR: Clearing the lake bed, ok.

OWEN: And then they started building the dam and they put the spillway in. By that time I was on machinery all the time of some kind. I don't know why but maybe I was inclined to be that way, I don't know.

DNR: As far as the facilities, the buildings, can you remember which ones were put in first?

OWEN: I believe that shelter house up on the hill when you first go in to the right. I believe that was one of the first ones. And then down there they put in the bathhouse and so on. Then the pumphouse over there, that was before they had rural water, and the plant to purify the water, then they built the shelter up on the hill above the lake there.

DNR: That's the lodge?

OWEN: At one time they built a bunch of cabins to be rented out.

DNR: They have since been torn down.

OWEN: Yes. And the men built all them things under the supervision of the state engineers, or national engineers, I don't know what it was.

DNR: Where in the development do you think the house would have been built? Was that pretty much one of the last things to be built, the custodian's residence?

OWEN: The custodian's house, well along about that time, kind of all built up there at once. The men built that, the CCCs boys built the house and the water system and all that.

DNR: There is a lot of stone work up there, was there experienced stone mason involved in that?

OWEN: Yes, there was one man especially. What was his name? He worked for the state or the federal government I don't know which. He was overhead more than us on that work.

DNR: He was in charge of the stone.

OWEN: Yeah, cutting it and cutting for the building.

DNR: So he was not a CCCs boy, he would have been a state worker.

OWEN: Oh yes, I think he was a regular engineer of some kind. I don't know.

Then they had another engineer by the name of Gay, Sacket Gay. He was the one that laid out the streets and the parking lots and all that kind of stuff.

DNR: When you were on the project who was your leaders? Were they military people or were they state workers or ?

OWEN: They had some older men there. Well, you had work engineers, state or national, I don't know who they was, a few of them around, there was 3 or 4 of them there, plus the state superintendents. Yes, there was some of them around.

Probably some of them was good engineers, times were tough and they probably couldn't get any other jobs then.

DNR: You mentioned a superintendent, was that a military person or was that a state worker?

OWEN: The work superintendent was one who worked for the national park service I suppose. That was the work superintendent, and then the other man in charge was military. The military clothed us and fed us. And supervised that part.

DNR: So the military took care of you when you were in the camp and the state took care of you when you were in the park.

OWEN: Yeah, oh there was another one there, funny I can't say his name. He was a nice man. He was in the military reserve someway or another. His home was in North Dakota. He was a rancher up there, horse rancher I guess. Isn't that funny, I can't think of their names, of course that has been a long time ago. He was a nice man. The men liked him.

DNR: You got along ok with the leaders?

OWEN: Oh, I always did.

DNR: How did you get your work assignments each day?

OWEN: You knew what you were working on and you just went ahead and did it. Somebody, whoever you were working under, they might get their orders from the superintendent. I remember one time we had a fellow there, this is a funny little incident in a way, he was a nice young fellow but he was an entertainer. That is he talked all the time and he would keep the other men from working listening to him, you know. I remember one time our work superintendent, Bob Durand, and he said to him, you come go with me. The fellow said to the work superintendent, I didn't know it was quitting time. He said well not quite. And they went up where they had a little, well they built the gates going into the park there, and they built a little sun shade there and he got the job of working up there by himself, just sitting there writing down the people that were coming and going. The number of cars and the amount of people going in and out. (Owen laughed here about the guy)

DNR: Recording the visitorship or something.

OWEN: Actually it was to get him away from the other men so they could work.

DNR: Sure. O.K. You were trucked out from the camp out to Ahquabi everyday?

OWEN: Oh yes.

DNR: What kind of trucks did they have?

OWEN: Most of them were old Chevy trucks.

DNR: O.K. And I assume that you would have eaten lunch out at the park then.

OWEN: Yeah they would bring our lunch out to us.

DNR: O.K.

OWEN: At noon when we were working.

DNR: Was that just sandwiches or something?

OWEN: Usually just sandwiches. Coffee or ice tea or whatever. The food was all right. I think back about it now and I know that it was all right. Of course we bitch about it.

DNR: Sure. How long a day would you have worked?

OWEN: Oh, I suppose about 8 hours.

DNR: So pretty much like an 8 to 5 type thing.

OWEN: Yeah something like that.

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

OWEN: Just about all kind I guess. I don't remember ever having chain saws.

DNR: No, didn't have any of those.

OWEN: Air compressor, air chisels, drills, drill into the rocks at the quarry. Oh, caterpillar tractors, graders, tumble bugs, name it we had it at the time.

DNR: A lot of the other people I talked to about the picks and the shovels and stuff. Did you get involved very much with the pick and shovel work?

OWEN: No I didn't but there was always a crew that were. I don't know why, I did some of it, seems like they always had me on a piece of machinery, I don't know why.

DNR: O.k. You said you operated a cat, now did you leave the cat at Ahquabi overnight?

OWEN: Yes, it just stayed out there.

DNR: It just stayed out there and then you came out in your truck and you got on your cat and went to work.

OWEN: Whatever I had to do.

DNR: Sure, ok. Do you remember any of your fellow workers that you were working on the job with?

OWEN: Oh yes there were one fellow by the name of Weaver, Jim Weaver. Oh, my I can't think of their names, isn't that funny I can't think of somebody name. This one man died just here a year or so ago at Indianola. Lucille and I went up to the funeral. There was a fellow by the name of Butch Butler, Oh my I can't think of their names.

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

OWEN: Oh once in a while, most of them are over on the hill someplace.

DNR: O.K. Did they have a mixture of city kids and country kids in the camp?

OWEN: Some of them city kids didn't amount to much.

DNR: Did they have problems getting along together or not?

OWEN: Oh not really. Maybe a little conflict occasionally

DNR: So you thought the city kids didn't amount to much?

OWEN: Well, some of them didn't.

DNR: I see. OK were there any minority groups there? African-Americans, Hispanic, Native Americans?

OWEN: There wasn't any colored men. We had an Indian or two. Seems like maybe we did have one colored man. Or maybe he was just a half-breed. He wasn't black. He worked in the kitchen as a cook, and a good one.

DNR: You mentioned the Mexican that was in the kitchen.

OWEN: He was a good cook too.

DNR: Was that the only Mexican you can recall?

OWEN: Well, I really don't know. I really don't know, I don't remember. If they were, they were American citizen.

DNR: Were they treated any differently by their superiors?

OWEN: No, not to my knowledge.

DNR: Were they treated o.k. by their fellow workers?

OWEN: As far as I know they were treated all right.

DNR: Other than you mentioned running the cat, were there other specific skills you learned while you were in the camp?

OWEN: Oh, learned how to read bridge stakes, run terrace lines for instruments you know, little things like that. Something you just learn as you went along, you just picked it up.

DNR: Did they help you after you left the CCCs camps?

OWEN: Oh yes any knowledge you gain anytime, helps you later in life, I don't care what it is. And there is nobody that ever gained, has enough knowledge.

Regardless of how smart they are. They can always use more knowledge.

DNR: Do you recall anyone getting injured at work?

OWEN: Oh yes.

DNR: Anything you can recall specific?

OWEN: Yes, I remember one man. He was a dump boss down on the dam. They built a dam and boy they hauled the dirt in on a dump truck most of it or all of it, and they would come along with a cat, an old grader or something and knock it down, roll it down. And he, I don't know why, he, someone yelled there was dirt coming in, but he was lying down and went to sleep and they come with the dirt and piled it up. And a man came a long and run over him with the cat but he was between piles of dirt and it didn't hurt him. I image it scared him pretty bad.

DNR: I would think so, run over by a dump truck, huh. The injuries were they just taken care of there in camp?

OWEN: Well, it depended on how bad they were, otherwise anything that amount to much; they went right to Des Moines to Fort hospital up there, military hospital.

DNR: So apparently Ft. Des Moines was pretty thriving at that time.

OWEN: It was, yes.

DNR: Kind of hard to picture that today.

OWEN: No, but at that time you know it was big for an artillery outfit, at one time and a cavalry outfit. I remember when the CCC camp was there at Indianola, every year, I don't know what time but must have been during the summer, here would come a troop of cavalry, soldiers on horses, right north of where our barracks was or tents, they would string up a line there and the trucks, they would have hay and grain and stuff for those horses. The next morning them horses would be gone by well 6 o'clock or 6:30 in the morning and there wouldn't be a spear of hay or anything left and the mature and everything just cleaned up cleaner than a pin.

DNR: I'll be darn. So they just moved in with the horses and stayed overnight and then moved right out.

OWEN: Yeah, the cavalry, that's when there was still troops of cavalry still at Fort Des Moines. I have seen when they had artillery unit up there. Most of them outfits had 4 to 6 head of horses on each unit, the artillery crew rode, I don't remember what they called them, the artillery crew rode that. They made a little tour once a year down around there. They camped at the fairgrounds at Indianola.

DNR: So the horses would pull the artillery pieces.

OWEN: Yes, and they went on west and I don't know probably went over there and took 28 back to the fort in Des Moines. I don't know that is the way they went but I know they went west from Indianola.

DNR: Were you ever injured?

OWEN: Injured?

DNR: Were you ever hurt while at work?

OWEN: No, nothing very bad.

DNR: Did you ever have any diseases run through the camp?

OWEN: Yes, more or less. It was terrible. I got the measles. Of course they quarantined us there. Isolated us at the medic building. I don't remember there was just 2 or 3 of us, I don't know how we got them but we had the measles.

DNR: Was there anything else like that that went through, flues or anything like that?

OWEN: Oh, nothing too bad.

DNR: Did you ever have any insects or rodent problems in the camp?

OWEN: No not that I ever remember of. It was run pretty good, we couldn't complain, but we did complain but really there wasn't a grouse worth.

DNR: Did you ever do any work for the city of Indianola to help out, say in a tornado, flood, or anything like that, or pushing snow?

OWEN: Yes, I don't know if it was Indianola but I would reckon it was. That winter we had so much snow, 35 or 36, there was such an all fire amount of snow and people running out of coal and we went to a mine out northeast or in there someplace, open the road and got trucks in there to get coal. And when the snow got so deep that one winter and when they would have a funeral they would call some of us fellows up and the undertaker would just get barely inside the cemetery up there, and then they would turn it over to us and us men would carry the casket or whatever down to where they dug the hole. I did that 2 or 3 times. I don't know how many times, maybe more than 2 or 3 times.

DNR: Did they pay you for that kind of work?

OWEN: No, we wouldn't take pay for that kind of work.

DNR: Did you have much contact with the outside community when you were camped there in Indianola?

OWEN: Oh yes. Quite a bit.

DNR: Were they pretty responsive?

OWEN: Oh yes

DNR: Do you think they were pretty happy to have the camp in town or not?

OWEN: I image they were because there was quite a bit of money spent there in town, groceries and a lot of other things. Of course they got a lot of their commodities from the fort but there was still a lot of it there.

DNR: OK did they have any fellowship organizations in the camp, like the Kiwis, or Rotary, the Lions?

OWEN: Not that I know of.

DNR: Could you tell me about any contacts you would have had with females and stuff while you were based there at the camp.

OWEN: Oh a lot of the boys had girl friends up town and I went a time or two with a girl I knew and took her to a show or something like that. I got acquainted with my wife. She was going to college up there. I knew her brothers down here. They lived over east here. I knew them and I got acquainted with them before I got in the CCCs. My wife was going to college up there and I could go get her and take her to the show or theater and have a malted milk or something like that. And there was a fellow up there in camp, Bill Eerily, he died a couple of years ago out in, oh what the name of that town, I can't think of it right now, this side of Council Bluffs. Any way his mother run a little, just a little hamburger stand, restaurant deal, and his dad had committed suicide and they didn't have much. Anyway he was out there in camp. He had a uncle that was a doctor someplace or other, it might have been there in Indianola, but I don't know for sure. He talked to him and he wanted to get out of camp. He said I will try to get you a job out at the college working for your board and so on, and you can go to school. By golly he did, he went to school and he got a good education and was superintendent of schools around over the country, served a hitch in the army. He just died here a year or so ago. He was a good man. In fact, his wife, Lucille and I get together about once or twice a year usually up at Winterset, meet up there and have dinner together.

DNR: Did you have any problems with the other young men in the community? Did they object to the CCCs guys coming in and dating their gals or anything like that?

OWEN: Not that I ever knew of anyway.

DNR: What do you think was your most memorable experience while you were in the CCCs?

OWEN: One time the lake was just filling up or had filled up, and there were a lot of logs and stuff that hadn't been moved out floating around and they sent a bunch down there to go out there and hook a cable on them so they could drag them out of the lake. There was a fellow by the name, I don't remember what his right name was, but they called him Whitey because his hair was almost white. And he was out there and I don't know why, hooking on them logs and whether he got in over his head, must have, and went down and couldn't swim but he was down and I was working there and I dived down and got hold of him and brought him up to the surface and about that time another fellow grabbed him too. And we took him into shore and he lived through it but he pert near drowned.

DNR: I see, back then you probably didn't know the mouth-to-mouth respiration and stuff so.

OWEN: If we had of, I don't know maybe they did, I don't know.

DNR: Maybe it was just the old thing of them pushing on your back and that sort of thing.

OWEN: I know they got some aide men there pretty quick. They always had an aide crew out around there. He came out of it all right.

DNR: Well good. I'm sure it was a memorable experience for you and I'm very sure it was very memorable for Whitey too.

OWEN: I bet it was too.

DNR: Do you remember any other odd experiences at camp?

OWEN: No, well they had a new man that stayed overhead. He was suppose to be learning to be an engineer, they sent him down there to work a while. They had what they called the state overhead where the engineer and them slept in the barracks. And they ate in the mess hall but they had separate tables for them, them and the officers. And this fellow had a mustache and boy he would have it curled out to a point. They got him drunk one time and they shaved half of his mustache off and dyed the other half, I don't remember but it seems like it was bright green or maybe pink, I don't remember.

DNR: I see. Dyed the other half.

OWEN: It was comical but what one couldn't think of somebody else would.

DNR: If you would go back to Ahquabi today, what would you feel the most proud of as far as the things you would see there today?

OWEN: That big shelter house up on the hill for one thing. The one that is just above the lake. And I look at some of them where the trees and stuff are growing now and it was nothing but an old cocklebur cornfield, but now there are nice trees growing. I get up there maybe once every year or so. I put a lot of time in there, I can see where I built those parking lots and so on and so forth with an old tumble bug and old hand operated grader.

DNR: Was there a state Ranger or anything assigned to Ahquabi while you guys were there?

OWEN: No but before we were through working there, they were still working, they assigned a custodian, I suppose he would be called a ranger. He moved in from Des Moines. A fellow by the name of Vern Hicks. He had been a deputy sheriff for Polk County on the narcotic squad. A good man.

DNR: OK. Do you think your life was changed by being in the CCC?

OWEN: Oh, I think so, you know at that time a lot of us old country boys, we had never been around much and met different people, maybe I had a little more than some of the others because I had been to Minnesota and worked, and up in the Dakotas and worked. But outside of that you know most of them never did know how to work with a bunch of men. I think they did a world of good for the whole country combined. I really think they did a wonderful thing.

DNR: What did you do after you left the CCC?

OWEN: I started working for the state conservation department in Lake Ahquabi. I worked I think 5 years or something up there and then I went in to the military service.

DNR: So you worked at Ahquabi, you worked with that Hicks then?

OWEN: Yes, I worked with Vern Hicks; I was assistant custodian or assistant whatever. There was 2 of us assistants, fellow by the name of Kenneth Krutchelow. I can't tell you how to spell it but that is the way it was pronounced. We both worked there. A good man to work with, we had a good boss.

DNR: Then you went into the military you said. When did you go into the military?

OWEN: 1942 I believe it was. It might have been about a year before that I don't remember. Oh, I think it was in 42.

DNR: Was you in the military at the time of Pearl Harbor?

OWEN: No I wasn't or was I. No I wasn't. That was on the 6th of December 19and 41. I didn't go into the military until 1942. After the first of the year sometime.

DNR: Were you in the army?

OWEN: The army, yes.

DNR: Did you serve overseas then?

OWEN: Yes, yes.

DNR: Europe or Pacific or where?

OWEN: ETO, European Theater Operations.

DNR: Right. What did you do after you got out the army?

OWEN: I bought a truck and trucked for a year. Then I sold my truck, they were still hard to get, for exactly what I paid for it and started working for the county, I worked for the county for I think someone said 28 years but I figured it up and it about 31 years.

DNR: 31 years, ok. Doing road work then?

OWEN: Yes, dirt work, road maintenance, and all that kind of stuff. Whatever came up that needed to be done.

DNR: So a lot of your CCC experience helped you out in your career.

OWEN: Oh, yeah, I suppose it did. Any knowledge you gain helps you out sometime. You may not think it ever will but regardless of what it is, if you mash your finger and someone teaches you how to wrap it up and so on. That's knowledge you have gained. That's the way I have always figured life anyway.

DNR: When you were at Ahquabi as an Assistant Custodian, did they have the shop there?

OWEN: Yes, we had the shop there.

DNR: O.K. What kind of tools did you have in the shop?

OWEN: Oh, just about, well we had saws, vices, drills, and we didn't have any welders.

DNR: Did you have a team of horses back then or did you have a tractor or?

OWEN: We never had no horses. Later on they got a tractor, but they hired the mowing with a team and horses where they mowed with a regular mower. They hired a man to do that. He lived neighbors there.

DNR: I see. We interviewed one of our old park rangers a while back. His name was Ed Meyers. Have you ever met Ed?

OWEN: Yes.

DNR: And he is still living up at Liberty Center. And he filled us in with an awful lot of details and I think Ed is 92 or 93.

OWEN: Yes, I got acquainted with him when he was at Winterset.

DNR: When he was at Pammel?

OWEN: Yes, I got acquainted with him then.

DNR: OK, have you seen Ed in a number of years?

OWEN: No, no I haven't.

DNR: I see.

OWEN: Then he got transferred over to Indianola.

DNR: Right and then I think he went up to Beeds Lake, I think.

OWEN: I don't know, I didn't ever

DNR: He retired out of Union Grove I think in 1972.

OWEN: Yes, I use to know the man. Where did you say he lives?

DNR: He lives in Liberty Center.