

CCC INTERVIEW WITH JAKE BUILTA

Date: August 25, 2002

Location: Ellsworth, Illinois

Interviewer: Larry Wilson

DNR: Where was your hometown?

Jake: Leroy, Illinois.

DNR: How old were you when you enrolled.

Jake: In 1938, I was 19. I was born in Ellsworth.

DNR: How long were you in Ellsworth?

Jake: Six or seven years. Then we moved to Ellsworth.

DNR: What did you do before you went to the CCC camp?

Jake: I was in school. It was a Depression. You could only make a dollar a day. I did some farm work. I was a junior in high school.

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

Jake: To have something to do. To help out my folks.

DNR: You were assigned to which ones?

Jake: I was assigned to Camp McCoy in Wisconsin for three months. I don't remember getting a discharge from Wisconsin. In 1936 I was in Wisconsin. I went home until I listed with Leroy. I didn't like Wisconsin. They let me enlist for three months. From '36 to '38 I worked on a farm for \$6 a week. One dollar a day. I worked around Clinton. Then we moved to Opalla. My dad died there. We worked for thirty-five cents a hour picking corn.

DNR: Then you got on a train and went out to Kenosha. Discharged at Camp McCoy. You were also at Callio. Why did they transfer you?

Jake: I drove a truck driving them out to work. They built a dam out there. I would serve their dinner at noon.

DNR: How did you get up to Wisconsin?

Jake: Train. I got on at Leroy.

DNR: Who helped you or talked you into it?

Jake: A friend talked me into it. I talked to Oscar Kirshner and he signed me up. He had a daughter named Betty.

DNR: Tell me about the first day of the camp?

Jake: You got your clothes. You got your shots. Then you got your bedding. Then they told you what barracks you were in and what bed.

DNR: What personal items did you take with you?

Jake: Just the clothes on you.

DNR: Did they tell you what you couldn't bring?

Jake: No cars.

DNR: Did they give you toiletries?

Jake: They started you off with some. But then you had to buy them after that. But they didn't cost much.

DNR: Do you remember how you were assigned lodging?

Jake: They just showed you.

DNR: Did you stay in tents?

Jake: Barracks with wooden floors.

DNR: Do you remember any of your bunkmates?

Jake: Well. Joe Nally, Williams, Lee, Mack Zigger from Bangors. There was oh, Dolton.

DNR: How did you guys get along?

Jake: Good.

DNR: How was the food in the mess hall?

Jake: Good.

DNR: Who did the cooking?

Jake: Regular guys. All CCC guys no civilians. It was about four guys.

DNR: Did they do anything special on holidays?

Jake: Thanksgiving we had turkey. Good meals. Every Sunday they would serve ice-cream.

DNR: When was payday?

Jake: The last day of the month. You got \$5. \$25 went home. Assistant leader got \$11. A leader got \$20 or \$45 in total.

DNR: How did you spend your money?

Jake: Cigarettes, pop, candy bars and tobacco.

DNR: Did you have a recreation hall?

Jake: Yes with ping-pong tables and a pool table.

DNR: Did you use a machine to get your candy bars or someone behind the counter?

Jake: Behind the counter.

DNR: Did you go home much?

Jake: I was in Leroy nine months and Utah six.

DNR: Were you in Leroy or Clinton?

Jake: Leroy.

DNR: Where did you go in Callio?

Jake: I drove the truck to pick up mail three times a week.

DNR: Was the Sabbath observed?

Jake: I don't remember. They built a swimming pool in Callio.

DNR: Was there any sporting activities in Utah?

Jake: None. But in Leroy we had hard ball baseball. I drove people to the games and played some ball.

DNR: Where did you take them?

Jake: Ellsworth.

DNR: If problems took place between men in the camp, how were they resolved?

Jake: They would go to the lieutenant. Everybody was friends. We were all there for the same purpose.

DNR: What kind of punishment would occur?

Jake: KP duty. You might have to peel a 100 pounds of potatoes. That was the discipline was the KP and cleaning out the grease trap.

DNR: Did you take advantage of any of the vocational and training opportunities?

Jake: Not that I know of.

DNR: In Wisconsin what kind of work did you do?

Jake: We set up telephone lines. I worked a lot in the mess hall.

DNR: In Leroy you were a truck driver as well as in Utah?

Jake: Leroy was soil erosion work. In Utah we worked on small parks.

DNR: Truck driver was a responsible position?

Jake: It was a great job. You didn't do any work on site. You were through when you dropped the men off.

DNR: Did you pick up any special skills?

Jake: No. We drove Chevys and Fords.

DNR: Did everyone get along on the job?

Jake: Yes.

DNR: How did you get your work assignment?

Jake: The boss man told you where to go. Larry, its too bad you don't have them today. Everyone acted right.

DNR: Did you have any special equipment?

Jake: Wheelbarrows, cement mixer, trucks.

DNR: Do you remember any of the people you worked with?

Jake: Keo, Shelkosky from Chicago.

DNR: Did you have any contact with anyone?

Jake: Most of them are deceased.

DNR: Did the country kids and the city kids get along?

Jake: You couldn't tell.

DNR: Were there any minorities in the camp?

Jake: Yes. But they all got along.

DNR: The CCC's segregated some minorities. For example the camps had a number after it. If the number had a letter 'c' after it then it stood for Colored. It would be a camp for African-Americans. Did you pick up any special skills?

Jake: You had no enemies. Just getting along with people. We had one Italian boy there and everyone liked him.

DNR: Were you injured out there?

Jake: No. But I suffered boils for two weeks in Utah. The doctor said it was the water.

DNR: If somebody got hurt was there a doctor there?

Jake: Yes. We had a dispensary. One part of it was a lieutenant's quarters.

DNR: Any diseases or sicknesses in camp?

Jake: No.

DNR: Was there a rodent or insect problem?

Jake: No. You didn't even see a spider. That place was spotless.

DNR: Did you do any work unrelated to the CCC's for the community?

Jake: No.

DNR: Did you have any contacts with the outside community?

Jake: No.

DNR: Did you have any contacts with any Masonic organizations?

Jake: No.

DNR: Did you have any contacts with girls?

Jake: No. At Callio you never seen nothing.

DNR: Were there any problems with the local boys in the community?

Jake: No.

DNR: How many in a barracks?

Jake: About thirty. We had two coal-burning stoves.

DNR: What is your most memorable experience in the CCC's?

Jake: We helped get this kid his mother back.

DNR: Any odd experiences in the camp?

Jake: No.

DNR: What was your biggest accomplishment and how did it change your life?

Jake: Getting along with people.

DNR: What did you do when you left the camp?

Jake: I worked on the farm. I met my wife. We got married in '41. We've been married 61 years. I went to farmin for myself in '48. Then I worked as a janitor for ten years. Then I ran the concession out by the lake. I did that for seven years. Wes Springer was head of the lake, the ranger and he asked me to take it. Bill Scott, the state senator, and asked me to work as the concessionaire.

DNR: In Iowa we have 83 parks. The contracts last three years for the concessions.

Jake: Then I went to work in the Grain Company eight years. I drove a school bus for 12 years. In 1982 I retired and went on social security. I drove the bus until 1995. I worked for 57 years.