

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Elmer Clayton

PHONE NUMBER: None listed

Interviewer: Larry Wilson

Date: June 6, 2002

Entry Date: 1941-1942

BOLD PRINT is CCC interviewee.

Regular print is the DNR.

DNR: I am interviewing Elmer Clayton from Ames, Iowa. Today is June 6th and it is about 1:15 pm. Where was your home town Elmer?

Havelock, Iowa in Pocahontas County

DNR: How is that spelled?

H-a-v-e-l-o-c-k.

DNR: Just like it sounds.

We lived on a farm a mile south of town.

DNR: How old were you when you joined the C's?

19, 20-20 years old.

DNR: 20.

Yes.

DNR: And what did you do before you went into the CCC camp?

Just farm labor.

DNR: And why did you enroll in the CCC program?

Well, I had been living at home and working part time at home and working out too. And in those days you put in some pretty hard days working at farm labor for about \$1.25 a day. And when you didn't have work you had to go home. I was raised by a stepfather in

The depression and it wasn't easy being at home either. The CCC's offered housing, food, clothing.

DNR: What camps were you assigned too?

Clarion. They referred to it as a drainage camp.

DNR: Worked on drainage ditches and tiling?

Yes, surface and tile drainage.

DNR: You don't happen to remember that number do you, by chance?

2736.

DNR: Ok that is good. You have been doing a little thinking about that. That's good.

Did you spend all of your time there?

I spent over a year and a half.

DNR: And then you went out of the C's or did you go into another camp?

I went into the navy.

DNR: OK. You were 20 years old when you went in, do you remember what year that was?

Early in January of 1940.

DNR: When you went into the camp did they issue you equipment, bedding, clothing about all of that.

Oh yes.

DNR: A lot of the guys were telling me they thought that the clothes that they got were World War surplus.

Well the dress clothes of course were the wool just as in the Army. I believe we used denim.

DNR: How about shaving kits, did they give you toiletries?

No, but there was a post canteen that you could buy it at a reasonable cost.

DNR: Did you take any personal items with you when you went there?

Just toilet articles.

DNR: Did they tell you not to take anything with you or not to keep anything there?

I don't remember if they restricted anything that you brought.

DNR: Where did you sign up?

Probably at the courthouse in Pocahontas.

DNR: Ok. And then they put you in a truck and took you to Clarion. Do you remember how you got up there?

No, I don't remember how I got there.

DNR: How about when they assigned you lodging a barrack or tent? Did they put you in a barrack?

Oh, yes a barrack. There was 8 barracks that housed up to 30 enrollees each.

DNR: So when you got up there and they assigned you to a barracks, they just said here this is where you will stay?

They would assign you to a cot and then introduced you to a barracks leader.

DNR: He was another CCC guy?

Yes, he was appointed by the commanding officer. Each barracks had a barracks leader and I believe an assistant.

DNR: How about bedding, sleep ware, pillows, blankets and things like that?
I believe that was all furnished.

DNR: Do you remember who you were in the barracks with?
No I don't.

DNR: What's that been 40, 1940, that's 62 years ago.
I haven't keep in touch with them, I do have a few names, but I haven't corresponded with them.

DNR: How did they guys' get along in the barracks?
Very good.

DNR: How was the food in the mess hall?
Very good.

DNR: Who did the cooking?
There was a person trained to do the cooking. And there was 2 or 3 that were permanently assigned to the kitchen, but then every one got there turn at KP, helping getting things ready and clean up after the meals.

DNR: Sure, were you up there for any holiday meals did they do anything special for holidays?
Oh I think they did, Christmas.

DNR: One of the guys I talked to had a menu from Christmas and one had a menu from a Thanksgiving dinner and it was a piece of paper like this. They had turkey stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy, all of these salads and side dishes and deserts and on the one menu they had the name of all the men that were in the camp. And then at the very bottom of the menu it had cigarettes and another menu another man had it said cigars.
I do remember that you could buy cigarettes for a nickel a pack.

DNR: When was payday?
I suppose it was at the end of the month?

DNR: Ok. Do you remember about how much money you made?
Well you started out at \$30.00 and then I was hospital orderly later and I think that was \$36.00. Then later I was company clerk and that was \$45.00.

DNR: You made a little extra money then, you took on some extra duties. What was the \$45.00 one, what were you doing then so you remember?
Company clerk.

DNR: Did some of that go home or did you keep it all.
I didn't send any home, no.

DNR: Did you get to keep the full amount?

Yes.

DNR: How did you spend your money?

I suppose I saved most of it.

DNR: You could go to the canteen.

That was the only place at the camp that you could spend it. I would buy a roll of tickets; I think they were 10 cents.

DNR: So you bought the tickets and take them into the canteen and exchanged them for an item?

Yes, in the canteen you would use the tickets.

DNR: Really. Did you have days off like Saturday and Sundays?

We didn't do the fieldwork on Saturday and Sunday's but there were usually some assignments at camp. In the barracks or the other buildings, I remember when I was hospital orderly once in a while I would get a Saturday afternoon to steel wool and wax the floors. And that was routine in the barracks, steel wool and waxing the floors. There was enough Saturday work detail that it was a busy day.

DNR: How about Sundays, how were they observed in the camp, were there church services or anything like that.

I believe we went over to a church of choice in town, I don't remember that there was an organized service.

DNR: How close was the camp from Clarion, right next to it?

It was in town, right next to it. It is all housing right now, residential within 6 blocks of center of town.

DNR: I am from Leroy, Illinois and there was a camp over there and it is now housing it was on the edge of town in those days and now it is residential area.

I don't believe there was any housing beyond the camp at that time. That area is all solid housing now.

DNR: How about sporting activities in the camp, baseball, football and things like that?

They had baseball games and softball. I don't remember anything like basketball.

DNR: Did you participate in any of those?

Softball.

DNR: Did you have any personal conflicts with any of the others there?

No.

DNR: If problems did take place in the camp among the men how were they resolved, do you have any idea about that?

Well I am sure there was disciplinary action where it was required and you would be reported to the barracks leader to the commanding officer, I don't remember that if any serious happened. It was patterned after Army life.

DNR: You are about the 25 or 26th one that I have talked too, and I asked that question about how everyone got along and about all of them said they got along well.

No problems that I remember

DNR: A lot of the fellows said they wanted to get along because they didn't want to get thrown out of that camp, they wanted to be there, they had to be there, that was work that was money, gave them something to do.

A few more got picked on a little as you find in any situation like that when you bring young people together and some want to dominate.

DNR: And rise to the top in their mind anyway. How about educational and trade opportunities, were they're any of those available there?

There were classes offered.

DNR: Did you take advantage of those?

I am sure I did. I remember I got some instruction in electronics, especially like two-way radios and some got quite a little instruction in mechanics.

DNR: You mentioned that you were an orderly at one time. Did you have to get some training for that?

No, I was a hospital orderly, no not really. You were there at sick call in the morning and made a record of what their complaint was and who came in, handed out the aspirins as the Doctor instructed and the Band-Aids and the iodine and swabbed the sore throats with iodine.

DNR: Sounds like what an orderly would do.

Well, a large part of it was keeping the place clean and orderly as well as keeping records.

DNR: So those classes there that were offered in electronics and mechanics they were done at the camp?

Yes there was a training officer, educational officer and weekend and evening classes.

DNR: So these classes you would go out and work during the day and then at night you could take classes.

Maybe an hour of math or something in the evening, they weren't compulsory they were voluntary but they quite well attended as I remember.

DNR: Sure, so what was the work you did up there at camp? Did you mention something about erosion control?

Well it started out in the work crew clearing and grubbing with an axe and a pick, tiling with a spade. I can remember being down in deep trenches where the sidewalls had to be shored up. Throwing dirt up out of the ditches.

DNR: I remember seeing some pictures of a man and his name was Tom Larson and he worked up there at Clarion and he had pictures of some of those trenches being dug for tile lines for shored.

Some of them were quite deep and some of them were quite large diameter. It was not the beginning of organized drainage districts but the work that we did was a part of an organized drainage district.

DNR: Well you put the drain in and the tile in, right?

And some surface drains where you clear the trees and brush and a dozer and a dragline would develop the waterway and let the drain tile come into the open ditch.

DNR: What were some of your duties? Digging?

Axe, shovel and spade.

DNR: You already knew how to use all of those tools?

I had been on the farm until then.

DNR: Do you remember any of the people that would be your leaders or foreman out on the crew?

Do you mean their names?

DNR: Yes, do you remember any of them?

Well I have some names and the names sound familiar but I really don't remember them personally.

DNR: Ok. When the fellows were up there in the field on the job did they get along ok?

Very good.

DNR: Did you get work assignments every day or did you get an assignment to go to this one piece of land or this one farm until you were done.

I suppose there was some organizing of what project needed the men and you were assigned a work crew. You would get in the back of that truck with that crew. There were, I am not sure if they called them engineers that were in charge of the job at out at the job.

DNR: Was there any specialized equipment that was used at the job during those days.

I can remember at least one dozer and a dragline and they gave the operators the opportunity to learn them.

DNR: Did you ever get a chance or the opportunity to run one of those?

No, I wasn't interested in being an operator.

DNR: The guys out of the job site got along well.

Very good and those that were most interested in the machines were the ones that got to try to operate them.

DNR: Have you had any contact with any of those workers over the years?

No.

DNR: That is pretty much the case with all of the men I talked to.

I don't remember if there was even anyone from my county that was there at the time I was.

DNR: How about the city kids and the country kids, how did they get along in camp? If you came out of the country, you would be a country kid and there were some kids in the city why they would be the city kids. Did they get along ok?

I don't remember if there were any problems of course the ones that were raised on the farms were the best workers.

DNR: Sure, they had been exposed to that kind of work.

They were use to doing those things.

DNR: Were there any minority groups in the camp like African Americans or Hispanic?

No, there was a time when they brought up some boys from Arkansas that was probably in 1940.

DNR: Were they African American kids?

No, they were white just like the rest of us.

DNR: I talked to some others where they said some Arkansas people came up.

I suppose they were the welfare type families down there and maybe those camps sites were full down there so they sent some up here.

DNR: I talked to one guy from northwest Iowa at a camp and they were going to transfer him and they thought they were going out west and they sent them to Arkansas. Not happy. Then I talked to one guy said some kids came up from Arkansas and this one didn't know his last name.

That is the way the Army does it. They put you in something other than what you are trained for and send you somewhere you don't want to go.

DNR: And tell them the opposite of what you want. Do you feel like you picked up any specific skills there at camp? Any thing specific?

Oh, I am sure I did. The classes and being a hospital orderly and company clerk was certainly different than farm labor. And then when I went into the Navy I am sure I tested out for the training that I got there, and the training had helped there.

DNR: Were you ever injured at work?

No.

DNR: Do you remember any injuries of anyone there at work or at camp?

During the time of being a hospital orderly one of the men died of cancer and I remember going to the ambulance, I even have a picture, of going to Clarion to Fort Des Moines to the hospital there. He died there.

DNR: He would have been a young man.

Yes, he was even younger than I was.

DNR: Have any disease in the camp like any pox?

A lot of colds in the winter, but I don't remember any contagious diseases.

DNR: There was a camp Dr there, wasn't there?

Yes, there was a Doctor.

DNR: Any insect or rodent problems that stick out in your mind?

No.

DNR: Did you have any activities any work outside of the camp, like in town that was not associated with CCC's?

No, I did a little bit of barbering at one time for extra money.

DNR: At the camp? How much did you charge for a haircut?

I believe it was like 15 cents, during the time I was infirmary orderly I also did some barbering at 15 or 20 cents each haircut and I earned an additional \$5.00 or more per month.

DNR: It is about a hundred times that today. Did you have any contacts outside of the camp like in town?

No.

DNR: Was there any fellowship organizations that you remember like Masons, Elks, Odd Fellows.

No.

DNR: Did you have any contact with females during your stay at the camp?

Some of us had a girlfriend over at town.

DNR: In Clarion?

We had an occasional date in town, yes.

DNR: Some dating.

Yes.

DNR: Was there any problem with young men in the local community that were not CCC's? How did that work, a camp full of guys?

I think we even played ballgames with local teams.

DNR: So the got along ok?

Yes, fine.

DNR: How did you think the local community of Clarion felt about the CCC camp being there?

I don't remember any problems at all and even when I was company clerk I don't remember any visits from the police department. Nothing serious.

DNR: Again, I think it goes back to the idea of that those people wanted to be there.

That's true.

DNR: Do you have one most memorable experience of when you were at the CCC camp?

No, I don't believe so, no disaster. I do remember that in wet weather it was pretty hard to work out in the drainage waterways. And it was pretty cold out there in the winter.

DNR: That would be tough. Did you have any experiences in the camp that were really strange or odd?

No, I guess it was what I was expecting it to be.

DNR: What do you think was your biggest accomplishment at the camp was, if you look back at those years?

I would say I got some good experience in organization both in the informatory and in the office during the time I was working in those locations.

DNR: How do you think working in the CCC's Elmer, changed your life?

Well, it was the transition to the farm labor to the military. This was just prior to World War II. We all saw that coming people were getting drafted.

DNR: Did you feel a little different after that year and a half there?

Yes, I felt much better off, much better prepared than if I had stayed in the farm situation.

DNR: You had some responsibilities there being company clerk and an orderly.

It was a great transition for that year and a half; actually it was 18 to 20 months, from the farm life to the military and World War II.

DNR: Lets talk about that, what did you do after you got out of the C's then?

Navy.

DNR: Went right in?

I volunteer for the Navy in September of 1941.

DNR: Tell me about that, where did you go, Great Lakes training station?

Great Lakes and stayed on for a service school, visual communication, signalman is what the Navy called it at that time. And then because the war had started and there was such an influx of recruits they kept me there as an assistant instructor in the service school.

DNR: And then what?

Then I went out to sea for a while.

DNR: Where were you?

Pacific. 43 and 44 on an anti air craft cruiser traveling with the big carriers.

DNR: Saw some action there?

Yes, with the big carriers. Way out making raids where the Japanese aircraft were coming from, where ever their navel bases were. Raiding their shore installations and in 45 I was on a British Aircraft Carrier for about 3 months and from there I was in the flag allowance of the Carrier Division Commander.

DNR: Where was that?

That was in the Pacific, all them were in the Pacific.

DNR: When did you get out of the Navy?

December 14th of 45.

DNR: And then what?

Iowa State University, GI bill.

DNR: Good for you. Tell me about that, did you get a degree?

Civil Engineering.

DNR: And then what?

I was doing highway construction and maintenance until 83 and I had a health problem and I wasn't able to work at all for two years and after that I was self-employed. I did bridge inspections and negotiated bridge maintenance work for a contractor.

DNR: Did you say highway construction and maintenance work?

Yes, I was a Scott County Engineer at Davenport.

DNR: Was that in 83?

I was there until 57 to 79 and came here with the DOT. Scott County Engineer at Davenport.

DNR: Well I will be darned. And then you came here with the DOT in 80?

No, it was in 1979 and in 83 I had a bad milogram that really screwed me up so I wasn't able to work for 2 years.

DNR: So after those two years you went into private practice for two years.

Private practice it was engineering commission sales is what they would call it. But I was negotiating maintenance work on bridge repairs.

DNR: Who was the Director down at DOT in those years, would that have been Ray Castle?

Ray Castle during that time. He lives over at Nevada.

DNR: Oh he does I didn't know that. And Warren somebody came in after him.

Dunham he was later. Dick Pricer was after him for 3 or 4 years.

DNR: How old are you now?

I will be 83 in December. There is more cause I wasn't real busy with private practice. I also worked for FEMA. Disaster Damage Assessments.

DNR: Sure.

All the way from the Virgin Islands to Nevada.

DNR: That would have kept you busy.

You went when they called if you was available and say we need like this is Regional 7 in Kansas City and if that region needed help they would call the regional office and say we need you in the disaster field office and fourteen men. And the regional office would go down the list and see whom they could get.

DNR: Did you about have to go when you were asked?

If you had a reason not to go you wouldn't have too but if you turned them down time after time they would be pretty disappointed in you.

DNR: They wouldn't let you chose?

No, I they said they needed help in the Virgin Islands you would go.

DNR: That wouldn't be to bad a place to go?

Well not really it was a pretty bad situation.

DNR: What was the disaster down there?

Hurricane Hugo and it is different there in there that they are a community of 80 square miles and no outside connections. Every thing had to come in by air or by ship and they didn't have much dock facilities and they had about that much airport. It was pretty hard to get materials in there. And they don't have local materials.

DNR: Pretty isolated.

Where as a storm or flood here would be a stream valley a half a mile away.

DNR: Did you keep any pictures?

And did you write up your experience. And that one is out of some newspaper publication.

DNR: And how about these pictures did you take them?

Yes, these are pictures I took.

DNR: You had your own camera.

I must have had a box camera. That is the Doctor the little Jewish fellow from New York.

DNR: Fink huh?

Yes.

DNR: And that is the company ambulance. Why did they put it up that way?

Yes that is the way the put it up so they could work on it and change the oil and grease.

DNR: And who is the little screaming?

He is the man that died of cancer.

DNR: What I am looking at here is some black and white photographs about 2 x 3 that Elmer took while he was in the C's Company 3726 inside of the barracks, raising of the colors, wrestling, cooks, cooks in front of the mess hall and a picture of the Doctor and the ambulance.

That is the head cook.

DNR: The company cook and his family.

He was married and that's her sister.

DNR: How old do you think he would have been Elmer.

He was probably 27 or 28.

DNR: A picture of a guy in a uniform with his wife and sisters with him. How about that walkway there is that brick.

That is brick.

DNR: There is work crew trucks lined up or inspections. Are those Dodges, do you remember?

I believe they were.

DNR: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8 of them there that I can see. They would haul the crew in there wouldn't they?

Yes, we rode in the back.

DNR: It's got a tent over the top of it.

Tarp canopy.

DNR: Sunday afternoon at a gravel pit, guys are out swimming aren't they?

Naked. (Laughter)

DNR: Skinny-dipping. It looks like a Model A sitting there. Yah there is a guy with his buns showing. How was the water? Good and cool in the summer.

Well yah, it was ground water that came up.

DNR: Here is a picture of you.

And a young man from Arkansas.

DNR: Willard Schadley from Colfax, IA. Henry Johnson from Belmont.

Henry is dead.

DNR: In this picture is this you?

Well I am this one on your right.

DNR: Ok. Front steps of office. 3726 CCC Camp, 1940. Remember who those people are, there are two people there?

No, one was Sally Halverson. Oh yes, you asked if we had girlfriends and that is I and that was my friend.

DNR: You had two girlfriends one on each arm.

One was her cousin.

DNR: A picture here of Elmer leaning up against the car, and a couple of lady friends on his arms, one is his specific girlfriend and her cousin. How old were these kids?

Well, I was 20 or 21; they were probably 18 and 20.

DNR: Good looking girls. Do you know whatever happened to those girls?

She married Henry Johnson and he died. She went to California about the time I went in to the Navy.

DNR: Has she always lived out there?

Yes I think she has always lived out there.

DNR: Now those are some pretty good pictures.

I could give you these copies.

DNR: Well great, for the record Elmer is giving me photocopies of the pictures that I just looked at. They are all good quality pictures. Thank you. Inside the barracks, let me take another look. No stove in there.

There were two potbelly stoves in the barracks. Maybe that was summer and they took them down.

DNR: We always took them down in the summer. Put it out in the washhouse. No different that in the Army.

Someone would have to keep the duty to keep the stoves going in the night.

DNR: So in the morning when you got up there would be a fire?

There would be a fire, it might not be a hot one, but someone had stoked it during the night so one was there.

DNR: So you would get up in the morning, get dressed and go to breakfast. What would be the first thing you would do in the morning?

Well the bathroom and then Revelry.

DNR: Where did you go to the bathroom in the barracks?

No up to the street where the latrines.

DNR: Clean up for the day and get dressed.

There were stools, not individual stools but a long bench with holes.

DNR: What did you do next?

Breakfast and then Revelry and a little inspection before you went to your work assignment. Policing the grounds picking up any paper or anything.

DNR: Got anything else? This write up that you did where did that come from?

I did this. I started with this and you may have seen it before and I don't remember where I got it Hawkeye Heritage, winter of 94.

DNR: I have seen this somewhere.

And this also Hawkeye Heritage, that is where I started then I wrote these two pages.

DNR: Well that is out of a magazine.

I am not familiar with this magazine and I don't remember how I came to have those, someone may have ran across them and made a copy for me.

DNR: What did you write up here?

Well before you read this one you might want to read this paragraph, which leads up to enlistment.

DNR: Are you going to give this to me?

Not that, I could but you can have a copy of this. I could let you have that.

DNR: Well if not I am going to read it into the record.

OK.

DNR: On a piece of paper that Elmer has prepared I reading it says and he has written this. **“In the fall of 1939 and we finished picking corn at home and I picked at Norvel Tinkens until his was completed around Christmas time. I picked a total of 5200 bushels. There would not be much to do until late March. If I went home I was another mouth to feed, as was the expression in those times. I was helping Uncle Henry Harsher with something at his farm when he suggested the Civilian Conservation Corp. I inquired at the courthouse, and there was no plan B so I reported to camp at Clarion Iowa after the first of January 1940. It afforded many advantages over farm labor. Shorter work days, food, clothing, a job with some educational opportunities and a regular pay day.”**

DNR: When you say there is no plan B?
I meant no alternatives.

DNR: Did you say I could have this?
Yes, you can have that.

DNR: With this interview paper there are two pages that are attached to it that Elmer has given to me of the third decade. The 1940's, the Civilian Conservation Corp.
I have written others from the beginning the first 20 years I called that and this is the third decade, which I called the CCC, Navy and College.

DNR: You joined the Navy up in Mason City.
At Mason City yes.

DNR: On September 11 1941. Ok These picture helped
There are two fellows that I know that have done some writing.

DNR: Howard Brow and David Calderwood.
He was my youngest girls father in law and he was in a camp at Oakville, I believe.

DNR: Howard Brow that sounds familiar.
They are big names around Audubon County.

DNR: Can I have this?
Yes, and the other man was from Clarion, David Calderwood, I ran into him here at school at Iowa State.

DNR: After the Navy?
He had been in the Merchant Marines.

DNR: Where did you get those tattoos's Elmer?
In the Navy.

DNR: Where were you?
San Francisco area is where I got these.

DNR: Good interview, interesting. So you were out in Scott County as County Engineer for a few years.

22 years there, before that I was at Keokuk County in Sigourney for 4 years and an assistant in Blackhawk County in Waterloo prior to that.

DNR: Ok this concludes the interview with Elmer Clayton.