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Interviewer: Larry Wilson

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BOLD PRINT is CCC enrollee John Gardner

Entry date: 1934

DNR: Where was your hometown, John?

At Grinnell, Iowa.

DNR: And how old were you when you enrolled in the CCC?

I was 18.

DNR: I thought you had to be at least 17 to get in.

That could have been.

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

I worked for a fellow by the name of Roy Bates in Grinnell and he had a greenhouse. I drove the flower truck, delivery truck.

DNR: So then you had a job delivering flowers to different places, so then you decided to enroll in the C's, why was that?

Well I tried to get into the Navy and they wouldn't take me because I had hammertoes. (Laughter)

DNR: That might have been a good thing.

I did not have any trouble getting in the service in World War II though.

DNR: So you joined the Civilian Conservation Corps.

I was in for a year.

DNR: The reason you enrolled is that you wanted to try something different?

Oh yes, right and adventure I guess, you might say.

DNR: And you enrolled in what year?

I believe it was in 1934.

DNR: What camp were you assigned too? Where did you go?

At Boone, Iowa.

DNR: Do you remember the number of that camp?

I don't but if I could find that picture it would have that information on it.

DNR: Again that has been a long time ago. There is information on those numbers so I will be able to find that.

DNR: Were you ever transferred or did you spend the whole year there?

No, I spent the full year right there.

DNR: Tell me about your first day at the camp, clothing, equipment what was issued to you. You lived in Grinnell, how did you get to Boone? Do you remember that?

I think I hitchhiked. But any way...

DNR: So you got to Boone and went out to the camp, then what did they do?

Yes, it was right on the edge of Boone. Well, I can't remember if they swore us in just like the Army, I don't remember. But anyway, they issued us clothing there was two or three different bags they assigned us too.

DNR: Did they give you toiletries and things like that, shaving kit?

Oh, yah, mess kits.

DNR: Did you take any personal items with you up there that you recall?

No, I don't believe so.

DNR: I have asked a number of folks and none of the guys I talked to did. Most of them just said they took up there was the clothes that I had on my back.

That was about my situation too.

DNR: Did they tell you not to bring any of this or that into camp?

No, I don't believe they said that.

DNR: How were you assigned your lodging? Did they just tell you to go to a certain place?

Yes, the buildings were numbers and they had barracks, bunks I mean.

DNR: Were they wooden barracks or tents?

They were wood.

DNR: About how many people stayed in those barracks, how many men do you happen to recall?

In the total camp in seemed to me there were around 180.

DNR: So those barracks then may have slept around 20?

Probably a few more than that, we had bunk beds.

DNR: Some had bunk beds other had the single cots lined along. Some of the men that I talked to in the early days of the core slept in tents.

Oh, that could have been. We had the wooden barracks.

DNR: One of the fellows I talked too said their first barracks were converted railroad cars, probably grain cars. That had been remodeled, retrofitted and that is where they

stayed when until they had a little different quarters or better quarters. So how about the bedding supplies and the blankets and all that? Was that government issued?

Yes that was issued.

DNR: Remember any of the people that you were in the barracks with?

Yes, a fellow by the name of Robert Arrasmith from Ames. And I found out Sunday he passed away last month. I was going to send you up to see him, but it's too late.

DNR: That is too bad. How did you guys get along in the barracks? Did they get along ok?

Oh, yah.

DNR: How was the food in the mess hall?

From what I remember it wasn't too bad. You know.

DNR: Plenty of it?

Oh yah.

DNR: Who did the cooking?

They had fellows that were regular chefs, maybe sent them to school to learn it.

DNR: How about the CCC guys, did they get enlisted to help with some of the cooking and clean up once in a while?

Oh yah. You done KP duty and that sort of thing you know what I mean.

DNR: How about holiday meals? If you were in Boone and in Grinnell, you could have gone home and may have gone home during the holidays like Xmas and Thanksgiving. Were you ever there at Thanksgiving or Xmas or any holidays?

No, I don't believe so; I usually went home during the holidays.

DNR: Do you remember if they cooked anything special that you can recall?

No, I can't remember.

DNR: Two of the guys that I talked to had menus from their camp. Once was for Xmas and the other was for Thanksgiving. They had quite a number of items there for dinner; salad and the rest of the turkey for the main course and on the rest of the menu were names of all the men in the camp, which I thought was neat. I noticed that on the one menu's on the bottom, it listed everything that they gave the men, one said cigarettes and on the other one at the very end said cigars. They got them started in.

DNR: So tell me about payday? First of the month or last of the month?

I believe it was the first of the month.

DNR: How much did you get paid?

I got \$30.00 a month. You got your room and board and clothes too.

DNR: Did some of that money go home, do you recall, the \$30.00?

I really don't know.

DNR: I think that what was at work there in those times and the purpose of the corps was to help the families as well as the young people that were entering. I think that \$25.00 of that went to the folks, and you may have been the exception, you might have had \$30.00 instead of \$5.00.

You know in those days it didn't take much and with all of that stuff furnished. I don't remember if I had to send it home or not.

DNR: What the others had told me is that they were paid \$30.00, but they only saw \$5.00, because the government sent the \$25.00 home. And one man told me I asked him how he was paid and they were all paid in cash. And the one man said he was paid in five silver dollars.

That would be different.

DNR: Yes, that would be different. Regardless of how much money you had to spend, how did you spend your money?

Well, if I remember everything was furnished, like toothpaste and shaving cream.

DNR: Did they have a PX at a place where you could go in and buy toothpaste, gum, candy and things like that?

I believe they did, but I am not positive on that.

DNR: Did you ever go into Boone?

Oh yah. You bet.

DNR: Take a little money with you when you went in there? What did you do in there?

Oh, go to a show or something.

DNR: How about days off, did they give you days off? Did they give you days off; you had some days off like weekends and holidays?

We had Sunday off. We weren't off too much.

DNR: Did you go home quite a bit or not?

Yes, I would try and get home a couple times a month.

DNR: How would you go home?

Bus probably.

DNR: Ok. How about Sundays in the camp, was their church services that you know of provided?

Yes, I think there was.

DNR: How about sporting activities, earlier you mention something?

I played a lot of baseball until I met my wife.

DNR: Was she a baseball player?

No, she was just an on looker. You might say.

DNR: Did you play in camp or just play each other or other camps?

Yes, some of that and we also played the local teams around town too.

DNR: There was a lot of baseball played back then a lot of the people I talked to participated in baseball and some of them had boxing. Do you remember that?

Was there any boxing there that you recall?

Yeah, not a great lot. I can remember of one incident a couple of guys had words, you know and they put the gloves on them and this one guy just got the tar beat out of him.

DNR: Did that sort of settle some of those arguments that way?

Yup, yup.

DNR: Sporting activities and some baseball, any other sporting activities that you recall there?

No.

DNR: Did they have a recreation hall or play pool or cards?

I don't remember.

DNR: Did you have any personal conflicts when you were in the camp there? Personal conflicts with any of the other guys?

No.

DNR: Was there any personal problems in the camp how were they resolved? You just said that one of the things they did was put the gloves on, right? Any other means of discipline that you remember?

No, not really.

DNR: If somebody was breaking the rules, coming in late, doing something that they weren't suppose to do would you have any idea how those guys would have been disciplined, or who would have done that, would the officers had a role in that?

If I did remember we did have bed check every night.

DNR: What would happen to a guy that wasn't in bed when he was supposed to be?

Well he would be put on KP or some duty that he didn't desire.

DNR: So you are saying he didn't get rewarded for misconduct?

No, no.

DNR: There was some educational and trade opportunities available at the camp, where you could learn to type or carpentry or stone masonry work or anything like that you can recall?

Not that I remember.

DNR: Ok. Lets talk about some of the work that you did. Lets start with Boone and Ledges, let's talk about Ledges and what you did up there.

Like I told you earlier there. There was a man by the name of Earl Tholeman, who was a stonemason. My particular duties in the Ledges, I mixed the mortar for him to apply.

DNR: So you were in the camp for about a year? You said you split about half of your time between Ledges and over to Ames then?

Yes, we made Lake Lavern up there.

DNR: So when you were over to Ames you were working on Lake Lavern. Did you split that time about evenly, about six months in each place?

I would.

DNR: When you were mixing that mortar do you remember where any of those ingredients came from? There is a reason for this question that I am asking you about. One of the earlier fellows that I talked too, I think it has just within a week or so ago. He said he worked at Ledges and one of his jobs was to go down to the Des Moines River and get the gravel out of the sand bars and gravel bars and they would transport that in to the Ledges area for mixing the cement and mortar, that what this one gentleman said. Anyway, you were mixing the mortar they were bringing the materials to you. It must have been pretty good mortar, those buildings are still together up there.

Yah.

DNR: Do you ever get back up there? Do you ever go up to Ledges?

Go through there looking for deer quite often. My wife has a sister living and she lost her husband about 10 year ago, so we go up every week to 10 days.

DNR: You probably pass through Ledges Park, beautiful up there isn't it?

Oh yah.

DNR: You probably see some deer too, don't you?

Oh, those deer are thick up there.

DNR: Those building were well constructed. The only problem the department is having with the buildings are mostly in the roof and those poles that were built across there for the rafters are decaying over 60 years, which you would expect and around window frames they need patching and replacing. But as for the stonework is concerned it is as solid as the day it was built. You did a good job.

DNR: Now what were some of the duties that you did at Lake Lavern on building the Lake there? Do you remember that?

No, I really don't. It seemed to me I did a lot of ditch digging. There wasn't much machinery around there in those days.

DNR: So you were actually out there building the damn up there?

Ah huh.

DNR: Saw some pictures that a fellow provided in an earlier interview of the wheelbarrows. One man was on the wheelbarrow handles and the front of the bucket was hooks and the man had a handle and a long piece of iron or something that him and he and another guy were pulling the wheelbarrow up the hill, so you are right there was much of mechanized equipment.

No, they didn't have any ditch diggers back in those days.

DNR: Do you feel you picked up any special skills when you were doing any of that work?

Not really.

DNR: Do you remember any of the people that you worked with out on the job? Were they pretty much the same as your bunkmates in the barracks, the guys that you would be working with?

Oh yah. This one guy is the only one that I can remember, that was Earl Tholeman and that was his trade, stone mason.

DNR: Was he a member of the CCC or was he brought in from the outside to be the stonemason leader guy?

I would think that the government put him in there.

DNR: Did you get along with all of your coworkers when you were out on the job?

Pretty much.

DNR: How did you get your work assignments? If you were working on mixing mortar up to Ledges that is probably you would get up in the morning and do the breakfast thing and the calisthenics and then you went out there and went to work on that about everyday.

They would truck us out there. I am not sure if you are familiar with Boone or not but you go into Boone on the old road on the east side of town. Yes, they would truck us out to Ledges and to Ames.

DNR: Did you use any specialized equipment? I guess we talked about that. There weren't any just shovels and spades, things like that?

That is right.

DNR: How about some of your fellow workers, do you remember any of them, were they the same guys that were in your camp in your barracks?

I remember two or three boys from Jefferson Iowa. Do you want their names? The ones that I know are all passed away. There was a fellow from Dana by the name of Dean Razz, I remember him.

DNR: How is his name spelled?

I think it was R-a-z-z.

DNR: Ok.

He was from the little community of Dana up in there. And then there was Bill Morehead from Jefferson he is deceased too.

DNR: Whenever you went out to those different work assignments like out to Ledges, did they keep the people kind of together like a work unit as they were in the barracks or did they kind of mix them up?

I really don't, I think that work detail would be here and they just kind of mixed them up.

DNR: They were just picked for work detail and they didn't care if they came from same barracks or not. That was a question I just wanted to pursue. What about the city kids and the country kids getting along in the camp, how did that go? You had some kids from the cities and some from the country.

We didn't have any problems that I can remember.

DNR: Was there any minority groups in the camp, African Americans, Hispanic American, Native Americans or any other minorities?

Not that I can remember.

DNR: Do you think you picked up any specific skills there?

Not really.

DNR: OK

DNR: How about injuries at work, anybody get hurt out there that you recall?

Not that I can recall.

DNR: Did you every get hurt.

No.

DNR: If someone got hurt on the job or at camp how did they get cared for, was there a Dr. there?

I think there was a Dr. in the camp.

DNR: How about diseases, small pocks?

I was going to tell you about one time we had measles and we were quarantined for six weeks. It seemed like the guys would just get over it and then someone else would come down with it.

DNR: Quarantined to another place or to camp?

No, we were quarantined to camp you know what I mean you couldn't go to town.

DNR: But they put you in a special room or did they just tell you to stay in your bunk?

They told us to stay in our bunks.

DNR: Tried to tell you to limit movement and your exposure. Six weeks, huh?
Lord, that was a long time to be down.

DNR: Who treated you for the measles?
It seems to me like they had a company Doctor that took care of us.

DNR: Ok, how about any insect or rodent problem at camp, rats, mice, insects, in any unusual numbers?
No, I don't remember any of that.

DNR: It sounds like most of those camps were clean. I have asked that a number of times and no one have had any reports of problems with rodents or insects.
I never will forget when I was home over a weekend one time and came back to camp, got into my bunk and something didn't feel right. And somebody had put and I don't know where they got it, but it was a bone off of a piece of meat. (Laughter) We had playful guys in camp that were always short sheeting, you know. You probably know what short sheeting is?

DNR: So a little of that went on.
Yes, a little hanky, panky yes, but I tell you I would be sliding into those sheets and something cold would hit me in the face and a big old beef bone. Where they got it I will never know but I came out that bunk a flying.

DNR: Tell me about the inspections? You would get up in the morning and you would have to clean up and straighten up the bed. Tell me about that.
Yah, that bunk had to be pretty smooth or you would have some actual details to pull.

DNR: Did you have a footlocker?
Yes, underneath my bunk.

DNR: What was in the footlocker?
Well, toothpaste and razor.

DNR: Where did you keep your clothes, did you have a closet or wall hangers?
I think they had hangers on the wall if I remember right. What didn't go there went in the footlocker.

DNR: Ok. Was that provided to you when you signed in?
I don't remember. But I do remember we had footlockers.

DNR: What did you do with your footlocker when you left?
Down in the basement.

DNR: Is it?

It is full of Xmas ornaments.

DNR: Is it wooden footlocker

No, it kind of a metal.

DNR: How big is it?

Oh, it's about this big. That is about all the bigger you want tote when it is full of clothes.

DNR: Xmas ornaments would be a little lighter.

DNR: Did you work outside of the CCC camp?

You mean later on?

DNR: No, when you were in the CCC.

No, I was either doing their duties or playing ball.

DNR: Did you have any contacts outside of the camp or with the citizens of Boone?

No

DNR: Pretty much confined to the camp.

DNR: Were there any organizations, Mason or Elks or Odd Fellows at camp that you can recall?

No.

DNR: Can you tell me about any contacts with females during your stay at the camp?

It was all right to mention that you went to the baseball game and 60 some years later your # 1 fan is still with you? Where was that game at John?

Mc Hose Park in Boone.

DNR: Is that where you met your wife?

Ah huh.

DNR: Where is she from, is she from up there?

Boone.

DNR: Did she come out to watch the baseball game?

Ah huh.

DNR: Who were you playing?

A local team.

DNR: From Boone and a local team and she happened to be there?

Ah huh.

DNR: Is that where you got acquainted?

Ah huh.

DNR: Is that how long ago you been married, 67 years?

We got acquainted back in 1934 or 1935. Wife speaking; "I got 65 years on June 6th."

DNR: She remembers that, you better make a note of that.

I got 66 in there.

Wife; Excuse me. Oh! I missed one. That's right. I told somebody yesterday 65, I will have to tell him different.

DNR: How about the CCC boys getting along with the young men in the community?

Like in this case in Boone or when you were working in Ames.

I am sure there were some. When you horn in on their local girls I am sure they did. But I can't remember too much of it.

DNR: If there was a problem I am sure you would remember that.

Oh yah.

DNR: How do you think the local community felt about the CCC camp being there?

Well, it brought money into the community, in that respect, but I am sure that some people did not like those guys horsing around with their daughters.

DNR: But again, your probably correct, those feelings probably did exist but not to the magnitude that it was a problem.

No.

DNR: Do you have one most memorable experience at the camp?

No, not really.

DNR: You remembered that beef bone in your bunk. (Laughter)

I bet you would too.

DNR: Let me put that down.

DNR: Anything really happen there in the camp that you thought was really odd or strange?

Not really. The long quarantine was quite unusual.

DNR: How long did you say that was?

Six weeks. We never got out of there for six weeks, measles epidemic.

DNR: Did you ever get them?

No, I never got them, but I couldn't go.

DNR: What do you feel was your biggest accomplishment at camp and how you life was changed by being in there?

Well, I think my acquaintance to my wife was quite a surge.

Wife: Watch what you are saying, I am listening.

DNR: How about, you were in there for a year and you were 18 or 19 years old. Do you feel like there were some maturity gains there, work experience, responsibility, and things like that?

Oh yah, responsibility, oh yah.

DNR: How about after you left the CCC's, so you went in, in 34 and you were out in 35 and then what? Then what did you do?

Well, I got married in 36.

DNR: Did you mention earlier that you went to the service?

I had hammertoes and they wouldn't let me in when I was seventeen. But after I got married I had six years at Rath Pack in Waterloo.

DNR: Ok

And then I went to Greyhound Bus.

DNR: How long did you drive for them?

35 years.

DNR: Was that out of Des Moines?

Ames, I started at Ames and did stuff here in Des Moines. But during those 35 years, I served 23 months with Roosevelt. I spent a winter and a summer in Japan. I was on Saipan when Harry dropped the big bomb. And you know a bunch of guys like that, "Well good, we will turn around and went to Waukomis, Japan and I say we were us there until July or August and I got out of there in the first of April in 1946.

DNR: That would be 46, so you were in, in 44, 45 and part of 46. What branch of service were you in.

Combat engineers.

DNR: Ok. What was the attitude of the guys when the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

Well, you know it was way, "Will turn this boat around and go back home," like I said, it didn't happen.

DNR: They saw an immediate end for them to get home.

Yah. I never will forget I slept on the beach at Waukomis for several nights in a sleeping bags, well it wasn't really cold but I went to bed with the clip in. You know what I mean you just don't trust them.

DNR: Sure, you were in the territory, Saipan.

Yes, we went into the beach at Osaka. And from Osaka we went to Keota and we were in some old Air Corps barracks. They were nothing elaborate but better than the beach.

DNR: I would say, better than sleeping in the sand.

We had a cot you know, with a 4" air mattress on it. Slept pretty darn good.

DNR: So when did you retire? Did you retire from Greyhound?

Yah, the 29th of December in 1976.

DNR: You mentioned earlier about doing some tour bus driving.

Oh yah, you know what I mean, I had 22 years from where they just call exec aboard, that is when you just go everywhere. And then during that time, it was about 56, 57 when I got going on these charters. It wasn't because I was any better drivers than the rest of them, I just happen to fall into it, you know.

DNR: 56? 57?

56.

DNR: So back in the CCC days, did you enjoy that?

Oh, yah. I enjoyed pretty good health up until a couple years ago and then I found out I had a skipping heart.

DNR: Well you are entitled to a few problems at 87? You look good.

Well, I feel good you know, but I told you when I had this laser surgery in West Des Moines a couple of weeks ago, they took my pulse you know, oh boy she through her hands up and she said, "I don't know about this, You got a pulse of 30." And they called in two or three Dr's and went ahead with the procedure. And when I got out of there I went down the street to Dr. Tromp, and they ran a cardiogram on me and it was still, I think it was 35. You know you read those pulses 10 times a day and you get 8 different answers, you know. But they doubled my medication and my pulse has come up a little bit. I think a normal good pulse is 70.

DNR: When you were in the CCC camps there, they would get you up in the morning, where was the latrine? Out back?

Well, it was a building off to the side.

DNR: How did they heat those building in the wintertime? Did you have some stoves in there?

I think they had some small gas heaters. It wasn't the hottest place in the winter.

DNR: In the morning did you have to form up like they do in the military?

Oh, yah. It was at 6 o'clock that you would have a revile.

DNR: Then after breakfast, then out to work?

Ah huh.

DNR: How about lunch, did they bring lunch out to you?

I believe they did. They had these huge aluminum kettles you know, were you in the service?

DNR: No.

Well you missed a good time. Yah.

DNR: So you made some friends. So you get back up to Ledges once in a while.

Oh, yah. Like I said, we would go to Boone and pick up my wife's sister and take a little ride down through the Ledges and boy, we can always see deer. The flood has kind of rearranged things down there.

DNR: You know, one of the things down there you C's built was a nice rock shelter down there. That shelter was within about a foot or two of being completely covered. Water was up on the roof in 93. We hired a contractor and they took that shelter apart rock by rock. Numbered the rocks, went back on the hill out of the flood plain and put that back together in a new location.

Good. That flood did a lot of damage. That particular year before the flood got going good, I bought a station wagon and at one time I dropped the back seat, I had 90 gallon jugs of water. I was hauling water for all of the neighbors.

DNR: We did some of that too. We would go up to the Hy Vee parking lot on 86th and Douglas and they would load those jugs up and they would give us the list of people to drop off those water containers. Folks just couldn't get out of their houses.

I think we were 12 days without tap water.

DNR: I just soon not go through that again. Anything else you want to talk about? Do you have some hobbies John?

Yah, we go fishing a couple times a year at Hot Springs Arkansas. We have been doing that since 54. We go over here to the library there at Beverdale you know, we use to go to Lions Park. We go to the library now and do Jazzercise a couple times a week.

DNR: Well good.

Have you ever heard of Lake Robins?

DNR: Sure, over by Perry?

We go over there and dance every Sunday night.

DNR: Lake Robins?

No, there is no lake there anymore. But it is about seven miles on the other side of Perry.

DNR: Was that built by the CCC?

I don't think so.

DNR: Wasn't there a Lake over there at one time?

Yah, it was a small lake.

DNR: So this is a dance hall?

Yah, Lake Robins. Yah, we went over there before we got married, the mother in law said that was not a very good place for you. But when you're young you break a rule now and then.

DNR: Where did you say your wife was from?

Boone.

DNR: And you were from Grinnell. Some of the folks I talked to said they a guys from Arkansas in their camps.

I hear some of them were from all over the country.

DNR: I have an uncle in central Illinois that signed up for the CCC's and they sent him to Utah, out on the west side of the desert.

Oh my, that would be a neat experience.

DNR: One fellow that I talked to say that a lot of the guys wanted to go west. One guy that I was talking to said he was in Sioux City. He was in a camp around Sioux City and they didn't tell him and these other men where they were going to go. They thought they were going out west, they sent them down on a train to Omaha and on to another train and they thought they were going out west with the CCC. And they went to Arkansas. He said there was practically a riot on that train because they had to go to Arkansas. Once they got down there they said it was ok, a little hot and buggy but they liked it ok. A lot of them wanted to go out west. I would have wanted to stay a little closer to home.

I guess I was just kind of looking for a little adventure.

DNR: Are you still a baseball fan, (to the wife).

Wife; No.

DNR: Just don't cheer for those Iowa Cubs.

She learned her lesson.

DNR: Look what it got you into. (Laughter)

DNR: Well do you have any thing else you want to add, John?

No.

DNR: I think I covered everything I wanted to cover. Grinnell to Boone worked at Ledges worked at Lake Lavern. That concludes the interview.