

INTERVIEWEE NAME: **ROSS GREGO**

Interviewer: Bob Schierbaum

Date: 2/25/03

Place: Council Bluffs, IA

DNR: I am interviewing Ross Grego in Council Bluffs, IA. Ross, nice to talk to you. Could we get started by telling me where was your hometown?

Ross: Council Bluffs.

DNR: How old were you when you enrolled in the CCCs?

Ross: Oh, about 21, I think it was.

DNR: 21. O.K. what had you done before you went in the CCCs?

Ross: Odds and ends jobs.

DNR: O.K. Why did you enroll in the CCCs then?

Ross: I had a lot of my friends in there.

DNR: What camps were you assigned to?

Ross: Council Bluffs and then I went to Clarinda.

DNR: Why were you transferred to Clarinda, did they close the camp down? Or do you recall why?

Ross: I don't know why, because they transferred us out there to work on a dam out there. It's been a long time.

DNR: When did you first start in the camp, do you know what year that would have been?

Ross: No, I don't. It's been too long.

DNR: Can you tell me about your first day in camp? Was it like a military induction or anything like that?

Ross: Oh, no just a common bunch.

DNR: Did they shave your head or did they issue you clothes or give shots and things like that?

Ross: Yeah they gave us clothes and shots.

DNR: Did you have anybody like a mentor that showed you around or anything or did they just kinda say here go over there and do this?

Ross: No, they had someone who took us around and showed us everything.

DNR: Did they issue you like a shaving kit, soaps, or things like that you needed?

Ross: They treated me nice, no complaints. We played ball and everything else.

DNR: Were you able to bring any personal items with you into the camp?

Ross: I don't recall that.

DNR: Were there any items that you were not allowed to bring to the camp?

Ross: They didn't say.

DNR: They didn't say?

Ross: No.

DNR: Where were you put up then, where did you sleep?

Ross: We slept in bunkers.

DNR: Bunk beds?

Ross: Yeah. On each side of the building.

DNR: It was a barrack then?

Ross: Yeah, it was a barracks.

DNR: How many beds were there in the barracks? Any idea?

Ross: Oh, God there were quite a few of them, just like in the army.

DNR: Who supplied your bedding?

Ross: Oh, you got me on that.

DNR: You didn't have to bring your own, did you?

Ross: No, they furnished everything.

DNR: Was it blankets and sheets and that sort of thing?

Ross: Yeah.

DNR: Do you remember any of your bunk mates, anybody else that was in the barracks with you?

Ross: You got me there now. That's been a long time.

DNR: It was just a couple of years ago.

Ross: Oh, yeah, just a couple of years ago – I am 87 years old now.

DNR: You are 87?

Ross: Yeah.

DNR: Can you remember how you guys got along?

Ross: I got along with everybody good.

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

Ross: It was all good. They fed us good.

DNR: Could you go back for seconds?

Ross: Yeah.

DNR: Do you know who did the cooking?

Ross: No, I don't.

DNR: Do you remember anything special about holiday meals?

Ross: No, I don't remember.

DNR: Ross, how long were you in?

Ross: Until they closed the camp up. Don't know how long that was. I stayed there as long as I could.

DNR: Was it a year or two?

Ross: Yeah, something about like that.

DNR: Do you remember when payday was?

Ross: I don't remember that.

DNR: Do you know how much you were paid?

Ross: No, I don't.

DNR: What did you do with the money you made, do you recall?

Ross: I gave it to my dad and mother.

DNR: Were you from a large family?

Ross: Oh, not too large, 3 boys and 2 sisters. 6 of us all together.

DNR: What did you do on your day off?

Ross: Played ball.

DNR: Did you usually stay in the camp or did you go home on weekends?

Ross: Oh, mostly we would go home once in a while and stay in the camp and play ball.

DNR: How did you get home?

Ross: We would walk home.

DNR: You would walk?

Ross: Yeah.

DNR: From Clarinda did you walk back?

Ross: Oh no, from Clarinda, we hitchhiked. We would hitchhike a ride from Clarinda.

DNR: I was going to say that was a pretty good walk.

Ross: Yeah, that would be a pretty good walk.

DNR: How was the Sabbath observed in camp? Did they have a church service or anything?

Ross: Oh, yeah they had a church.

DNR: Did they have like a pastor in camp or something.

Ross: Yeah.

DNR: A chaplain, then.

Ross: Yeah.

DNR: Did you go to church or not?

Ross: Oh, yeah.

DNR: Did they have like different denominations or was it one service?

Ross: One service.

DNR: Was that held, like in the dinning hall or did they have a special place?

Ross: In the dinning hall.

DNR: You kind a touch on this, but tell me about the sport activities in camp, you said you played ball, was that hard ball or soft ball?

Ross: Softball.

DNR: Did you have a traveling team?

Ross: Oh we traveled around but not too much. Just played hometowns.

DNR: So you played some local towns?

Ross: Yeah. Omaha and Council Bluffs.

DNR: What position did you play?

Ross: Pitcher.

DNR: Were you pretty good?

Ross: Well, we played one game 13 innings and won 1 to nothing.

DNR: Well, that is good. Did you play anything besides softball?

Ross: That is about it, softball.

DNR: Can you tell me about any personal conflicts you might have had while you were in the camp?

Ross: I don't recall.

DNR: Were there any like pranks or anything like that people would do to other people, like short sheeting them or anything like that?

Ross: No.

DNR: No pranks?

Ross: No, none at all.

DNR: If there was a conflict between a couple of guys how would that be resolved?
Ross: Oh they would break them up in a hurry. They don't like having any scuffles.

DNR: I have heard of them telling about settling arguments by putting on the boxing gloves and having them fighting it out.
Ross: No.

DNR: That never happened?
Ross: No.

DNR: O.k. Was there any boxing in camp or anything like that?
Ross: I don't recall.

DNR: Were there any other sports in camp, like basketball or football?
Ross: The only thing I know is that we just played softball.

DNR: If someone did something wrong, how were they disciplined?
Ross: Boy, you got me on that, I don't think anybody did anything wrong in my camp. That was a good camp.

DNR: They didn't have anything like KP or anything?
Ross: You would volunteer for KP.

DNR: Oh, you would volunteer for that.
Ross: Yeah.

DNR: What would they have you do then?
Ross: Oh, dishes, serve food out. They helped guide.

DNR: I have heard some people say if they did KP they got additional food and stuff. Was that a factor or not?
Ross: No.

DNR: I heard that there were some trade or educational opportunities in the CCCs; did you take advantage of any of these?
Ross: No, I didn't.

DNR: Do you know who the teachers were?
Ross: No, I don't remember them.

DNR: What were some of the main projects that your camp was involved in?
Ross: Oh, making up dams and stuff like that on the farms.

DNR: Was that at both camps?
Ross: Oh, yeah.

DNR: I haven't heard much about the Council Bluffs camp and stuff, what kind of work did they do?

Ross: Same thing like you do on the farm, build them dams up.

DNR: So you would go around to local farmers and that sort of thing.

Ross: Yeah.

DNR: That was basically soil erosion work?

Ross: Yeah.

DNR: What were your specific duties? What kind of things were you involved in?

Ross: Oh construction, building land breaks, stuff like that, getting logs and laying bricks.

DNR: Laying bricks?

Ross: Yeah.

DNR: And what did you do with the logs?

Ross: Making dams out of them.

DNR: Did they teach you any skills while you were in there?

Ross: No.

DNR: Some of the camps they had what they called LEM or local experience men, did you have any of those, do you recall?

Ross: I don't recall, no.

DNR: Who were your leaders?

Ross: I don't remember now.

DNR: Were they military or were they civilian?

Ross: They were civilian.

DNR: Did you get along with your leaders o.k.?

Ross: We got along fine with them.

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

Ross: Oh they would put them on the board.

DNR: Did you have a particular truck that you would get in everyday?

Ross: Yeah.

DNR: And did you always work with the same people everyday?

Ross: Yeah, it was the same bunch.

DNR: Did you have like a crew?

Ross: Yeah we had a good thick crew.

DNR: Any idea how many people in the crew?

Ross: Oh, I would say 15 or 20 of them.

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

Ross: Shovels. We used axes to cut down timber.

DNR: Did they have like a place where they would rent out this equipment to you or something?

Ross: No, they had them right in the barracks.

DNR: The tools were in the barracks. Did you have to get them in the morning and turn them back in at night or anything like that?

Ross: They always turned them in at nighttime when we came back off the field.

DNR: Do you remember the names of any of your fellow workers?

Ross: No, I don't recall none at this time.

DNR: Have you had contact with fellow workers over the years?

Ross: Nope, none of them.

DNR: Were there city kids and country kids alike both in the camps?

Ross: What is that?

DNR: Were there city kids and country kids?

Ross: Mostly city.

DNR: Mostly city kids.

Ross: Yeah.

DNR: Were there any minority groups in the camps, Native Americans or African Americans or anything?

Ross: I don't remember.

DNR: Can you tell me about any specific skills you learned, just how to run a shovel or was there anything else that you learned.

Ross: That was about all, just mostly all that work. Common labor.

DNR: Yeah, common labor. Did this work experience help you out after you left the camp?

Ross: Oh yeah.

DNR: Any particular way?

Ross: Oh lots of ways. Getting good jobs. That's about it.

DNR: Do you remember anyone getting hurt at work?

Ross: No. Not as far as I know.

DNR: Was there like a hospital or a first aid tent or anything like that?

Ross: We had a first aid place.

DNR: First aid, ok. Was there a doctor on duty?

Ross: Oh, yeah. A doctor was always on duty.

DNR: Was that a military doctor or was that a civilian or do you recall?

Ross: I don't recall now. I think it was a military doctor.

DNR: Military, ok. Were you ever injured?

Ross: Nope.

DNR: Were there any diseases at work, do you remember, did the flu or colds or anything like that.

Ross: No, I don't remember that one.

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

Ross: No.

DNR: Did you ever work outside the camp, helping out the local community?

Ross: Oh yeah, we always helped out around there.

DNR: Any particular things you did that were different sorta things helping out.

Ross: Taking care of the park and all that stuff.

DNR: Taking care of the park.

Ross: Yeah, ball park. Keeping that in shape.

DNR: Were you paid for that?

Ross: No, just what the CCC paid us.

DNR: Just what the CCC paid you. What contacts did you have with your local community? Were you able to go in on weekends or anything like that?

Ross: No, I don't recall.

DNR: Were there any social organizations, like Masonic, Elks, Odd Fellows, anything like that in camp?

Ross: No.

DNR: Can you tell me about any contact you would have had with females while you were at the camp?

Ross: No, none.

DNR: Were there any problems with the young men in the local community? You guys ever get in any fights or anything like that?

Ross: Oh no, they treated us nice.

DNR: How do you think the people in the local community felt about the CCC camp in their town?

Ross: They hated to see it leave.

DNR: Really, how come?

Ross: Oh, because they did all the work somebody else don't want to do.

DNR: I see. What do you think was your most memorable experience while on the Cs?

Ross: I can't remember.

DNR: Do you think your life was changed by enrolling in the Cs?

Ross: Oh, yeah, it was changed quite a bit. Keeping me out of trouble and all that. They should start that up again. I think they would get a lot of kids back in there.

DNR: Yeah, I have heard that from a lot of the people I have interviewed. What did you do then after you were in the Cs?

Ross: Well, then I went tried to put together a job. Working in an oil station, washing cars.

DNR: Is that what you did for a career or did you get into other things?

Ross: Oh that is about it, and then I started cooking in a drive in.

DNR: How long did you do that?

Ross: Oh, about a year of it.

DNR: Were you in the military?

Ross: Oh, yeah. In the infantry.

DNR: In Europe or the Pacific?

Ross: The Pacific. Down to Seoul in Korea, Philippines, and all of them. All of them islands.

DNR: What did you do after the war?

Ross: Well, I got a Dear John letter.

DNR: A Dear John?

Ross: Yeah. Loss my family.

DNR: You loss your family.

Ross: Yeah, she got a divorce.

DNR: Oh I see, ok. Did you get married just after you got out of the CCCs?

Ross: No, I waited quite a while.

DNR: All right. Then are you retired now?

Ross: No, I am still working.

DNR: Still working? Where are you working now?

Ross: I do yard work and deliver papers, snow removal. 87 years old and still out there working.

DNR: Well, that's good.

Ross: Another job.

DNR: Well, you sound very sharp sir, and the people that can keep working are the ones that sound real sharp.

Ross: That's right.

DNR: It helps to stay active.

Ross: That's right. Stay active and you'll be all right.

DNR: I know I have had a hard time getting a hold of you. I have tried a number of times and I never seem to be able to get you. You must be working quite a bit.

Ross: Yeah. Just ready to go to work now.

DNR: Are you? O.k. This is pretty much all the questions I have. I am going to sent you this release and if you will sign that. I will send a self-address stamped envelope so you can return it to me. And if you by chance you have a picture of your self, I would love to have that and stuff. We are going to try to make this a history project and make a CD and get this into some of the schools.

Ross: O.K.

DNR: All right and thank you for your time.

Ross: You are welcome.

DNR: Bye for now.